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# Title Killer Was Here

Elizabeth Trimbach

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# TITLE KILLER WAS HERE

## POEMS

by Elizabeth Trimbach

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Master of Arts in  
The Department of English  
The School of Arts and Sciences  
Rhode Island College  
2011

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I

## *Late for Dinner*

I turn up the steep hill toward home.  
I'm late.  
Late for dinner,  
with what I'm supposed to bring,  
late for everything.

Azaleas are thick with color:  
I'm strangled by fuchsia,  
not ready for spring.

There's that peeling three-story on the left  
with a faded skeleton in the front window  
from Halloween, six months ago.

I arrive in my driveway  
where the white lilacs  
just begin to flower

and my husband  
is at the door;  
he and the children  
have got the dinner on,  
the pasta and clams.  
I'm bent over my notebook,  
writing with a hard hook  
toward the highway  
the long summer road to ocean,  
where I am.

## *Singing*

her singing were not enough  
and not at all fly

bringing the mountain to the house  
dishrag teabag  
Showtime and glory  
she runs circles around the bones  
of her

take a train to the city the city  
blue chunk of sky slamming at the windows  
of the apartment buildings

she doesn't know what this will mean  
to the children  
their faces like

she's off on a tear he says it  
to her often

and not enough  
bringing the house to the mountain  
dishrag teabag  
drowning in Story

What will this mean for the rest of us? They said it  
not enough

the children  
the children are singing  
their faces like

### *Scene*

Broad shadows sink into the river  
broken by rectangles  
of windowed light.

Ducks swim toward deep  
structures of stacked ice and debris,  
gulls hang above watching  
for a different sharpness.

The reflection comes clear—  
a whole set of buildings glistens  
and wavers. A gull dives  
after silver.

Trees bend over the windows in water,  
reach with pithy nubs,  
clouds cover the sky, a city is gone.



*A Mirage in Winter*

It's dull  
and I try to be glad,  
stretch out  
on the not sharp edge of it,  
let my head grow an afghan.

Outside air — a gray swath that steams  
the window with wool.  
Thick mittens cover the sill.

Smells of wet fleece and chicken cooking  
transmute my rages.  
Like roses, they blossom quietly.

I eat a leg,  
a plate of hot noodles  
with lime juice.  
A glass of wine

warps in my hand.

You sit across from me, cracking  
pistachios.

The dog has sores on her elbows  
from too much lying down.

I feel them gather behind me—  
the poisonous fragrances.

Her seal head  
prods my palm; yes,  
I must look  
at the glimmers at the edge,  
the vapors that sharpen  
into form.

*Husband,*

I eat the eggs and bacon  
you have made me.  
The bacon is too greasily, too scandalously  
delicious  
to have not involved killing.  
I eat, am living.

All this time  
I've lived with you.  
And now your orange T-shirt  
against my cheek.  
I hold onto you.

My hand slides up,  
glides over the hair on your arm  
which is like a field of grasshopper wings.

My lips drawn uphill to your lips,  
behind our closed eyes  
clouds of grasshoppers rise.

## *Begin*

I dreamed I would buy you  
the headphones and your  
father was there and something  
swiveling overhead.

In the background a warm golden  
spiky in the center  
but all warmth and laughing  
around it.

We always wondered what  
would happen and

Try not to be in a hallway,  
a grand tall hall;  
be often open and  
just entering.

A console with red roses in a vase  
and pictures in frames  
before a mirror –  
I never had one of those.

Collapse praise in the face –  
seven years bad  
or 27 or something. It was

a hard callous.  
News at night,  
we thrilled at not being them,

bad anyway, til sounds  
are written, escape  
the black tile, whethering  
whethering.

### *Everything is Normal*

I lie down on my new  
lawn, think of nothing but how  
green it is and lush and comfortable  
to lie down on. Green

like a river. Green

like a girl's eyes,  
staggering green like an immense forest.  
18,000 dead in Bhopal,  
another 100,000 sick.

Bug-free, weed-free, odor-free!  
For \$800 and it's only the beginning  
of a lifetime of care.

The heavy gases urged by wind remained  
close to the ground  
killing the smallest first.

A siren sounded and was turned off.  
Within a few days all the leaves  
turned yellow and fell.

2,000 buffalo, goats and other  
animals. Groundwater still contaminated,  
a warm breeze passes over me where I lie.  
*Everything is normal; this is no*  
death by negligence.

*Workshop*

I wrote a surreal poem and submitted it  
to workshop.

*Brushmarks of injury, really? Cold lingerie?*

*A sea pouring into the oven?*

And the two plain-speak  
poet advisors ripped it  
a new asshole (because  
it had one of course).

And I know if John Ashbery  
had been there  
he would have reminded them  
that they know nothing;  
and they would have cried  
and I would have sat on his knee  
and they would have blubbered.

And then we would have gone outside  
to sit on the green green grass  
of the campus, my hairy, little poem  
licking itself with relish  
under the ram's head fountains;

everyone would have laughed  
in the tremendous sun,  
drunk streaming wine and eaten  
lacustrine ice cream,

except for them; they  
would have stayed inside  
drying their eyes, babbling  
about clarity, finesse, cleanliness.

All around us sing and bling  
the bright-feathered birds that gossip, offend, cheerily  
chuck rocks at teacups, brace against newspaper uniform,

follow the thin bloodlines of cracks, an ocean into an oven  
and out again, until the end.

## II

## *Heredity*

At this point in an action  
into this place  
in which two opposite qualities  
are combined,

beginning a bold or unpleasant  
willful and persistent –  
an animal of solitary habits, a baptized member.  
Passing a person in charge of a herd,  
holding title, progressing  
in a fitful or jerky manner,  
an individual, also called  
brigantine.

Interpretative, identified with Mercury,  
offering a toast or existence  
after death.  
Here is your paycheck,  
along with this,  
often containing raisins or nuts.



(a found poem from a dictionary page that includes the word, "heredity")

*February, March*

You never know; she might  
scream "Fuck you!" and slam her door  
or she might text me, "Love you, too,"  
even taking the time to write out  
the words.

And I find myself saying a lot,  
"She's just tired," because I don't know  
what she is. I'll wait for her  
in the car, the moon full,  
sharp at its edge – curved knife slicing dark muscle ,  
but murky in the center – a winter pond begun to melt.

At this point, the ground's thrown  
off the dying snow –  
a mass of sticks and wet dirt murmurs –  
I feel the taste rise,  
a small sour sadness  
like the last barnacles of dirty ice  
clinging to curbs.

She's broken up with her boyfriend –  
I drop her off at school and  
there he is.

"I hate my life," she says. Her knee  
knocks the ashtray as she gets out,  
spilling pennies, nickels, dimes.

She seems to flit past him,  
I can't tell if she says hello  
as she goes away from us.

I bend, begin  
to scoop the change.

### *When He Says He Still Loves You*

Try to avoid those morning  
ladders and ladders of good intentions,

when a crescent  
of white light breaks in at one edge of the shade  
like undershirt poking through an open fly,

those soft-boiled egg  
ideas, halved on a plate, of *maybe he's changed*, and *I should try harder*,

for climbing exhausts,  
and all that you could have done instead piles in the corners  
eviscerated and lost as the dust.

## *Red Suede Boots*

Red, up-to-the-knee, suede boots,  
heels quarter-inch thick, four inches long. After yoga class  
she slipped them on.

In yoga, we step out of conditioned past.

Sa ta na ma;  
working mind attends  
to what needs to be done. Thinking mind  
thinks about something else.

(That time I was at the beach writing in my journal  
“I just want a glass of wine and sex” and two seconds  
later this young guy walked up and made a pass at me.  
No wonder people think the universe is listening to them.)

Sa ta na ma;

avoid getting caught in thoughts, be  
where you are, feet on the mat, mouth open. Lion's breath.

Sa ta na ma;  
A room full of people breathing  
in one nostril and  
out the other. Soft lights of candles and a gas fire  
in the stone fireplace. It's dark outside and nineteen degrees.

Balanced on sacra, bend our bodies in half so top and bottom are both  
forty-five degrees from floor, then sixty degrees. Breathe. For five minutes. Like  
eight hours of exercise. Like fish jerking  
their way back to water.

Step out of conditioned past, feet on the mat.

Sa ta na ma;  
we roll up our mats, hers spills out on the floor  
in front of me – the beautiful, shining floor. The teacher  
embraces a lone student squatting.

Sa ta na ma;  
she pulls the red boots on over tight leggings,  
steps easily over broken sidewalk.  
Like that time at the beach – a mixture of horror and joy, the sight  
of a mountain goat leaping from rock to rock at cliff's edge, a young man  
with a glass of wine in hand saying, "this is so awkward, but..."

## *A Dream Before Thanksgiving*

A killer has resurfaced and is after my mother.  
Dark evergreens cluster at the corners of houses.

Suddenly I want to have sex with my ex.  
Later, I change my mind and regret not acting faster.

My mother and I are in a room with huge windows of  
amber leaded glass in the shape of a castle.  
I think that I once lived here.

My seventeen-year-old daughter appears as a ten-year-old,  
gives me a hug and says, "Happy Halloween!" I say,  
"Why are you so little?"  
My ex says, "It's your Christmas present."  
She skips away down the stairs;  
I lean against the wall, weeping.

### *Who Can Believe?*

When you looked at me—  
I don't remember,

but a wish to be broken  
like an egg yolk, and some days,

the orderly rows  
of the neighbor's red tulips

could incite me to murder.

I get through it—  
the blue waking,  
the triathlon,  
the feast,  
the sleeping dog,  
the hunkered garage.

And I dream the dreams  
that are only saying of themselves,  
*Who can believe these dreams will end?*

*Won't there be a place,  
a field deepening with flower  
upon purple flower?*

*Won't there be gold-  
green leaves,  
a forever sky,  
and you?*

### *Life's Emergency*

One day the wind was so strong the seagulls flapping their wings  
stayed in one spot above the shore.

Despite what EHarmony says, common interests do not create chemistry.

She broke up with her boyfriend and took him back  
and broke up with him again  
just like I did with her dad.

You can't find an evolutionary explanation for everything.

I live on Walton Street and I really hate the Waltons  
but when I was a young girl I was in love with Johnboy.

My little dog hates all dogs that are bigger than him.

The grass is always the grass and is deserving of reverence  
because it is so.

Are they the same Waltons who own WalMart?

A skateboarder swept back and forth down the street  
like a beautiful catfish  
feeding on the sparkling blacktop.

Some patriots tried to mob William Stafford because he was so damn peaceful  
it was unbearable.

My daughter and I get along much better when we're texting.

There may not really be such a thing as a soul, nor, therefore, as a soul mate.

A huge cat sat one morning on the frozen water in the pool.

Two brothers were shot six blocks from here in another world  
called the projects.

Beluga whales, seeming to smile at humans through thick glass,  
make everything better.



There is only one male atheist on Match.com.

Suicide prevention could be a full-time job.

Two trees are dead in front of the house for sale across the street  
and without even noticing that fact  
I planted two new ones in front of mine.

Again, this ability to love to live emerges green and urgent.

# III

## *Vignettes*

*(Is this a fitting title?)*

I found a dime on the ground and I thought of it  
falling from a great height like an airplane,  
its light flat circling against the air,  
its sure steady drop through the arms of gravity  
onto this sidewalk where children consider it great  
good fortune.

*(Fortune = luck, fate, or wealth)*

What is it to see something  
to see through something  
to see the thing you are looking through?  
Transparency is never.

*(Who is speaking?)*

The remains of snow lie frozen, sprinkled with filth,  
like piles of bones. Bare trees look like they're upside down  
with their roots exposed. I look at this through my car window.  
I ain't no Robert Frost. Someone should cover this shit up.

*(What is the narrator railing against?)*

A drunk woman in a British sitcom staggered  
into a telephone booth, pulled down  
her knickers and squatted. And I wondered  
do they still have telephone booths in Britain?

*(Funny? Self-indulgent?)*

What is it to see?

*(See = to perceive, to view, to recognize, to learn, to visit)*

## *Alchemy*

Two things broke – a lightbulb  
and a coaster: rigor and system – outer world.  
She drank one beer and acted foolishly: inward  
search of romantics. Kissed beside the car.  
Glittering, extravagant snow floats down onto and between  
houses like radiolaria: external ice, romantic myth.  
Amidst five-foot stacks of snow, she walks the dog in the street,  
talks on the cell phone. Outward objective: overcome  
contradictions of universe. “I thought I really  
liked him.” Every day 38.5 million people act foolishly.  
Confounded by cavernous snowbanks, the dog  
pees right on her foot. The artist  
embraces opposites, married within a vessel:  
button-down smooth as silica, broken glass.

*Morning Night Future*

Absence is here  
Here begins  
Now

Now I find  
Window shapes  
Separāte

Separately eat things  
Move on  
Away

\*

Away sleep slips  
Oh laughter—  
Television

Television the new  
Dreamer on

Space

Spaced carefully apart  
Times to  
Dimmer

\*

Dim light morning  
Could snow  
Again

Again will wake  
Wander brake  
Now

Now begins here  
Here is  
Absence

### *Surfaces*

1. Sitting in the Zen Center, focused  
on the door, on one door,  
focusing on a door, waiting. On the wall,  
“Before the ancient Buddha appeared  
one thing was already perfectly clear.”
2. Eye on the smooth bark of a birch,  
where the river's reflection  
flickers, a dark heron gliding down.
3. After pouring rain all night,  
cattails, full like sponges, bobbing,  
the willow's ropes

of leaves drag the skin of the water.

4. At home, the wiping of the afternoon table,  
sorting of mail, lotus green tea bag in a cup, blood hum  
above the bone. Just a turn, slight. Just a slight turn  
and clear water rushing into the kettle.

### *The Drinks are on the Table*

A nod  
of  
a duration simply  
declarative also  
but with only judicious  
derring-do.

A glass with  
ice snaring air  
someone

said it's  
over

air in  
thunk.

Clarity–  
a definite  
voice with indefinite  
air around it  
and only  
eyes  
that return  
return to bases.

Spilling on the table it's  
liquid voration eroding  
varnish it's  
only a partial  
levitating open wide my  
air

no velocity  
none.

Return

return to curve

slip air

slipairslip  
slip

return to curve.

*Cento*

the telephone rings the mailbox is empty  
the fear that one is dreaming  
much as it was ten years ago fifteen



I find myself thinking  
eternally buzzing over the time  
active roll resisting

distance was by now  
like memory  
a small anchovy gleam  
a fin a stroke  
swim into the shaded  
limitless like listless

I wanted everything changed  
not meet you or make you certainly not figure you out  
pale houses pairs of junipers  
winter butter  
granite darkened by rain

so many listen lost  
crying because empty  
the ball of the heart's expectation  
slows as sense descends  
I only hope you can hear that

simple and ruinous hunger  
when teeth emerge  
what is except so defined

huge pine a quarter mile off  
still and hidden  
in a larger darkness  
in the murky distance  
loneliness as reckless

if a small tear swells the corner of one eye  
all the way down to the snow  
on evergreens and ferns  
no regret for his choices

crying because lost  
exhaling on second thought

clustered berries at dusk  
tall grass prairie  
the invention of hunger

a shadow opened then folded

to what also is moody and alters  
attention hands

unable to live in it  
to stand next to be there with  
watching man die

presence

quicker than you think come apart

a great if different pleasure  
vanish/flare

believing was eating day by day  
I am hungry let me eat  
peripheral in pain unnoticed  
the torn cushions  
charmed verges of

will arrive too late or ruined by water

(a cento made from words and phrases from several  
poems, by Jane Hirshfield, Charles Bernstein,  
and Rae Armantrout)

### *This Time*

In the TV show "Lost," time was a string  
and folks could go back and see themselves  
as babies or young women and men.  
I wish you would come back and find me.

If folks could go back and see themselves  
(what the fingertips love is the reaching),  
I would wish you'd come back and find me  
back and forth in the sun swinging.

What the fingertips love is the reaching  
more than the actual touch.  
Back and forth in the sun swinging  
through to the light and down into night.

More than the actual touch  
it's being moved somewhere like waves by the moon,  
through to the light and down into night  
where memory is at peace with the present.

It's being moved like waves by the moon,  
allowing a song to sing you,  
where memory's at peace with the present,  
there's nothing to shame or undo.

All day we're losing  
the babies, young women and men,

but this time, I've come to find you  
not lost but here on this string.

## IV

*Initially*

It's just awful

for instance  
in the middle of the kitchen  
burning

or the brown ring under  
the shampoo bottle in the bathroom  
greasy like lipstick.

For instance, what has happened  
to me? Am I cured  
or at a new level of derangement?

But that never happens.  
The hope is that in the morning.

At 4 in the morning every thought  
is a decision.

Imagine the stars are new and anxious.

A fear of being stupid  
only moves things  
around. The air gets pushed  
out of the way.

It's nice to talk on the phone  
clear as day  
initially.

*Ego*

the problem is that you wanna kick ass –  
is it a problem of ego?  
wanting all eyes on you and not admitting?  
Obama? Moses? a sardine?

out of the blue  
she started to hate you

moments of brilliant blue happy  
and so is everyone around it

the dog stretches his bird wing and out of it  
blue  
wanting all I's  
just realize everyone likes flow and feng shui

and the blue lit-up numbers –  
little pods of potential contact  
    of having a say  
and also they  
are shaped like eggs

or is the biggest problem the cost?  
    the dangling holiday  
    before a suicide.

*Negation of a Poem, or What You Don't Want Is*

what you don't want is  
not enough

to not have what you want  
what you don't want is

someone else's valley  
and above that valley

a cloud  
outside the cloud a frenetic

hummingbird or four  
nor fat fleas

leaping onto the back  
of a possum

around the valley  
and back a hole

deep where you  
cannot lie or guess

your zero firepits  
your zero ponds

or guess the demons  
going out of the valley

to eliminate  
Demon minus Demon minus

(a negation of the poem, "What I Want Is," by C. G.  
Hanzlicek)

### *I'd Like an Everything*

Sometimes I lose the whole thing in Starbucks,  
Seven Stars or Stars & Donuts – ok, I made that one up.

When one considers, one places next to stars.



Over a cup of coffee is a good place to consider.

What is art? A mechanic's eye boldly stroked  
in blue, black, yellow and red.  
A charcoal cricket – the light on its wings  
is absence of charcoal.

Steam from cups rises to the ceiling.

Outside the window  
a starling bounces on a stalk  
in the emptying garden.

I lose it all – a blanket dissolve –  
heavy china set down on metal tables,  
the soft fabric of old chairs.

Just coffee  
or, an everything.

Everything.  
Everything.

*Do Not Enter into Self-Criticism*

said the guru. On the front porch,  
I slide a scraper under  
layers of paint – green beneath white beneath blue. *First  
event.*

The neighbor lady – don't you want to  
love her like a little baby, curl up  
under her coffee cup, her large  
flab arm?

Or go to the seashore to attain clarity  
in times of crisis? *Second event.*  
*What are you going to believe about yourself?*

*Beginning, middle and end – in between  
there is silence,  
space between.*

She calls her cat, Lily, Lily.

The top layer is the thinnest; it  
peels like sunburned skin. *Third event.*

*For when you do, you tear your own  
heart.*

Heavy sediments of limestone  
and shale, explained  
as ancient.

## *Dark Winter*

What else can we do? Moving  
forward at full speed, prepare  
for the worst,  
respond

to a mass-casualty  
event; the good news—  
enough small pox vaccine to inoculate  
all Americans; these dramatic  
steps

may not protect  
from mailed envelopes, high anxiety.  
Not even an actual event  
is needed,  
just a simple hoax—

what the world watches.  
We still haven't learned—  
who've survived attacks, experiments.  
You only have one face. We're no longer  
different from  
the rest of the world.

And only one chance. He holds  
a bony hand. Too terrible to hear.  
He has lost  
forty pounds. Attractive,  
fit, she could still wear a bikini.  
The middle-aged Russian

brothers with minds of infants— of course  
your head has to match your body;  
this is very important.

Propped on a cushion against  
the wall of poison gas attacks,  
frogs and birds were lying dead  
all over the ground. *We had no  
gas masks.* The entire  
right side of her face dissected  
away from her skull. Gravity  
is indomitable. Rumors

it had been anthrax. *Our son  
had spent the night. The people  
in the morgue refused to dress the body.*  
Deliberately,

aware of the extraordinary power  
of his gloved hands,  
he began cutting.

Fetuses in jars in Kazakhstan— there  
are no skulls, no brains  
behind their faces.  
Face is identity.

A nuclear bomb test had gone  
off 100 miles upwind. He was three,  
sitting on his father's knee;  
together they watched.

When you get a lemon  
you take it back.  
Did it come from drinking  
too much soda pop? The minute  
a government crosses the threshold—

he lifted it this way and that—  
the United States finally acknowledged  
that it made others sick—  
himself partly an artist.

The vision of looking,  
it has to start lying.  
Some of them want to look better.

A society obsessed with age—  
life should hold more excitement.  
No cure for the damage, hibakusha,  
agent orange, Geiger  
counters going click, click, click.

Botox injections showed more  
dramatic increases.  
Don't let them bother you.  
What a plastic surgeon can accomplish—  
acquaintances could lurk—  
a real Dark Winter is not  
about to descend.

(a found poem from 3 news articles)

*Title Killer Was Here*

Without direction or instruction –  
open on the floor –

white pants  
and jacket.

After a number of years,  
recovered –  
the lost crown.

See if you can turn it around.  
Twin River – beaten, left for dead.

Three daughters all  
killed in their home  
in Gaza

which he will never leave.  
Dogs run right under  
the wheels defending.

Scalene is unequal.  
Jaylene is a girl's name. I can't remember  
what's in this box.

*Stopped at a Red Light on the Overpass in the Rain,  
Looking Down*

All these cars  
burst from a forest of mist  
and surge down  
the highway like cut timber on a river—  
a matting that could hold us under  
until we drowned.

Naively, I think  
I will never drown.

I'll grow sleek fins  
and a fat buttery tail;  
I'll take all  
the water heaven has  
to offer.

The light turns green,  
creates a brilliant gouache on the wet road.  
Slowly, propelled through smoke and steam,  
we roll forward  
in the rain,  
in the world.