LITTLE BLACK DAYDREAM

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the editors and staff at the following journals where the original versions of these poems appeared:

“Time Grants the Two of Us Some Perspective” and “This Therapy Has Had Amazing Results” appeared in The Antioch Review.
“Megalography” appeared in Barn Owl Review 5.
“First Antiphon of Callow Youth” appeared in Cincinnati Review.
“Poem That Cries at the National Anthem” appeared in 580 Split.
“Limits” appeared in Floyd County Moonshine.
“Using” appeared in The Louisville Review.
“Last of the Soviets” and “Nostalgic Love Poetry: A Poetics in Ten Parts” appeared in The Nepotist.
“Life During Wartime” appeared in Puerto del Sol.
“Procedure” and “Why I Love What Breaks Down” appeared in Quarterly West.
“Death Is a Hysterical Dynasty” appeared in The Rumpus.
“Maximalism: The Inaugural Address” appeared in Shadowbox.
“Maximalism: A Romance” appeared in The Southern Review.

“This Therapy Has Had Amazing Results” takes its title from the poem “At the Treatment Center” by Jerome Sala. The phrase “Bureau of Metropolitan Longing” in the poem “Maximalism: A Romance” is taken from a letter by Harold Brodkey. The poems that contain the word “Maximalism” in their titles do so as a tribute to late nineteenth-century political thought, which posited that the collapse of capitalism was inevitable. Advocates suggested a “maximum programme” of social-democratic policies that would replace fallen capitalism. Among the tenets of such a program are freedom, justice, and social solidarity. “Death Is a Hysterical Dynasty” is dedicated to John Hansen and Rocky LaLiberte. “Megalography” takes some of its language
from a *Time* magazine column on the explosion and sinking of the Russian submarine *Kursk*, which occurred in August 2000.

I’m also thankful to the following friends for their support, guidance, and editorial assistance: Erika Meitner, Carmen Giménez-Smith, Al Maginnes, Natasha Sajé, Brian Spears.
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The Symbolic Landscape of Your Childhood

… burned in the riots of ’68.

A refrigerator overflowing with the props of toy kitchens: cornucopia of margarine, luncheon meats, cardboard carton of five plastic eggs. A gallon of milk carved from birch, painted in lead paint. Simulacra of the land of plenty.

Talking bears. A menagerie of animals, each with invented name and fully imagined backstory.

You fell asleep to the susurrus of what you imagined to be owls.

You used permanent marker to draw a line on the back of your legs, seamed stockings, something you’d seen in the *Midnight Mystery Movie* with either Veronica Lake or Lana Turner. You were in the fifth grade.

Every summer, I passed through your symbolic landscape, the pick-your-own apple plantations and woodland grottos of central Michigan, your house so close to the highway.
Once, in the front yard, I saw a girl playing with the corpse of a miniature dog, making a pageant out of her vague pantomime of resuscitation. As I drove past, she spoke, words inaudible over the hum of tire noise and the whip of summer wind. I imagined this litany pouring from her lips:

*Sometimes our best efforts fall slightly short.*

The symbolic landscape of your childhood is one of the few man-made objects which can be seen from outer space, and your town was never a town at all, but a neighborhood, solidly working class, Polish or Ukrainian or black Irish. People who used to live here drive through at irregular intervals, shake their heads, speak in codified slurs like *tax base* and *property value.* The cars parked at curbside are no longer cars, but burned-out carcasses. See also *Oldsmobiles, bison, American,* and *migratory herds.*

The first boy you ever kissed lived in the house I am standing in front of now. You do not remember his name or the cause of death. You remember only the iridescent caftans.
favored by his mother,
her perfume which smelled of vanilla.
She called you
by a string of multisyllabic nicknames,
which you also cannot remember.
The salt on your lip and charcoal in the air
and the pleasant stinging heat of a sun
warming through your shirt.
The abrasive slide of your fingers
across a popsicle stick.
A sudden urge to mow the lawn.
Benzocaine, as in the topical ointments.
See also mercurichrome.
Salves and medicaments.
Your grandfather: Vicks VapoRub.
The secret treasure of Sucrets,
the lasting toy you made of their tin box.

That one house where none of the children
were permitted to trick or treat, final resting place
of the symbolic landscape's first urban legend.
Apples with razor blades, or LSD, or both.

A vintage automobile on blocks
in the driveway,
the subject of your mother's nonspecific complaints.
An eyesore. Proof of said neighbor's lack of focus,
his spendthrift ways. It was an Austin Healy
or an MGB,

but in your recollection of the symbolic landscape,
the car has morphed into a 1966 GTO with redline tires,
and the driver is a boy a few years older, two tattoos. A rosary all in silver hangs from the rear-view mirror and an air freshener from the radio volume knob. He puts on the *Hot Eight at Eight* and talks about buying you new underwear, but never does.

You sit on the hood, warmed from the radiance of the engine block, and even in late August feel the onrushing cold of Michigan winter, the wildness of a prairie storm forecast in the pattern of falling leaves. How bored you are by more rain. The boy leaves, one arm lazing out the window, dogs barking in reply to the squeal of tires. A dozen house finches rattle from their perch on the telephone wire, and you watch as one tennis shoe hanging there swings over your head, sliding out an inch or two of shoelace at a time until it drops to the asphalt below.

This is the landscape you want to see in ruins.

You have made the promise not to return until the windows are covered in three-quarter-inch plywood. Perhaps you want to see it all burn. What would it take to conjure a tornado? Graffiti on the garage of an abandoned home says, *Fuck It All Up.*
The ice cream truck starts with the trilling of its bells, but there are no children left to run toward the sound.