

The Three Einstens

Sarah Galvin

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

University of Washington
2014

Committee:
Heather McHugh
Linda Bierds

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:
English, M.F.A.

©Copyright 2014
Sarah Galvin

Massive Object

I want to spend my entire paycheck buying fancy drinks for ladies, and I want at least three of the ladies to be you. I need to prove that computers were entirely my idea, or at least that I might knock over a table at any moment. And you, your face is very symmetrical, your scarf has a certain pattern. You will show everyone that my ashes are constantly blowing away to reveal some massive object. You will make me look as if I don't love you, even when I find your hairs in my books.

Handbag

I don't want to be anyone's new handbag, left on a glass table in a nightclub where all the songs have auto-tune. I am not some mindless object, to be appreciated only for its physical beauty—I just want to be allowed to decompose naturally. I also want a gift certificate for a hot air balloon ride. At the university, I rode a hot air balloon everywhere, in an advanced state of decomposition, while beautiful women with accessories that glowed in the dark like the constellations beat off to my voicemail.

Go Ass-Crazy

The poster instructed me to go ass-crazy, which I imagine means something between stealing a VCR and getting married. Another poster appeared to say taco salad when it actually said tool sale. The posters made me realize what horrible danger I would be in if I were the sort of person who allowed words xeroxed onto colorful paper to influence my behavior. I might go into a hardware store I believed was an Azteca and then die years later in a car accident.

The Way Things Are Going

I'm intensely ashamed that I'm not developing a vaccine, but there's no specific disease I want to prevent. I try at least not to create any new diseases, but the way things are going, I probably will. Don't even get me started on the way things are going. This morning I learned that all living things die one day. Then I cut open a potato, and inside it there was a muffin.

Windmill in Your Nightmare

I was a windmill in your nightmare, but you were waking up. The wind left my outstretched arms unmoved, no matter how long I stood there shouting "whoosh, whoosh, whoosh." In conversation with you, I can't say I enjoy standing here like a crazy person who's been kicked off a bus. If I do something that makes me look crazy, I want it to be for sexual reasons, or in order to lift an ancient curse.

Moving and Breathing

To have no mouth seems catastrophically irresponsible, like that dream in which I'm unable to explain to the police why I'm wearing nothing but a pillowcase, whereas having no head seems like a wise relinquishment of responsibility, like the dream in which I decide not to perform surgery, because I'm not a doctor. Alas, when I wake up I'm always halfway done operating.

A Dead Person on the Bow of a Boat

We drink purple cocktails with white foam on their surfaces that are nicer than what we normally drink, you in your shirt with stripes that match your sweater and me in my belt that matches my shoes, I tell you how I like to break into abandoned houses and you tell me how you like to chloroform people for fun, you tell me about being a law student and I tell you about doing PR for an appliance company, and I lie in bed, maybe for years, wondering how you fall asleep so quickly, and feeling like the kind of state-funded sculpture made of people after they die, designed to appeal to everyone, like a bronze person standing on the bow of a boat, and then one day on a crowded beach I realize why you sleep so easily is not the question, but what keeps me awake, which is the absence of this woman lying face-down on a towel.

Sit Down on a Discarded Couch

The reason you're always married is your shirts are boring. If you buy a shirt of mint-green fabric with pictures of Victorian ladies drinking tea, your life will be like that movie about the couple who enjoy asphyxiating each other with plastic bags. They sit down on a discarded couch to open a package of bags and the couch comes alive and fucks them both. You don't have to wake up every morning to the same totally comprehensible scenario. The morning can be like a movie, if only because of a slight pressure on everything, like a doctor's fingers on an abdomen.

Crusade

When my friend and I dug a ten foot-deep hole in a baseball field, I remembered a magazine article that compared two men fucking the same woman to digging a hole with complete concentration, neither guy looking at the other's shovel. The night my friend and I fucked the same woman, I woke up at 3 am and watched her sleeping between us. My friend slept turned to the wall. I thought of the things underground that no one existing had touched, bones, jars, porcelain dolls' legs, the unbroken bottle we held and looked at so carefully as the maintenance guy on his lawnmower roared through the sunlight above us.

Wild Men Who Caught the Sun in Flight

My grandpa taught himself to walk again after his stroke. He limped around his bedroom in circles every night, alone. It took years. My grandpa walked around his room a lot. Around and around and around. The room had a coffee table. Once he told me, your grandma was really into feet, but I'm too ticklish. Whenever I tried to put my foot in her mouth I'd start giggling.

Black Umbrella

I don't know anything about life, except that I'm terrified of my massive financial debt, and the only thing that calms me down is a naked girl with two beers. The beers have to be either both for her, or both for me. I rarely have the opportunity to explain this. Most of the girls walk out of my apartment before they're even completely undressed, saying things like, "Summer makes me feel like a black umbrella is opening in my chest." Maybe they're in more debt than I am.

Imaginary Friend

I'm great at being an imaginary friend, but terrible at sexual torture. When I take my belt off to beat people, my pants fall around my imaginary ankles. I'm so insecure about it I have enrolled in Imaginary Friend Grad School to distract myself. I stay up all night on adderall, turning invisible and putting ketchup in grownups' coffee. If I see people being beaten with belts on TV, I turn it off and continue researching renters' insurance. I still don't know what it is. This would all be fine if I wasn't so old. I've been researching renters' insurance for hundreds of years.

The Really Big Volcano

I chose this person because everything else is gaping--the walls, the floor. It makes me feel like those scientists who looked for the source of volcanic activity at Yellowstone for years before realizing the entire park is a caldera. I don't want to be a scientist, I hear they shoot blood out of their eyes. It wouldn't help to have a scientist's understanding of the caldera, since my resources are limited. Those include a squash and a couple of sweaters, enough for myself and one other person. When we're fucking, I like to imagine the resources circling the bed, emitting a low hum.

The Only Light Source Should Be a Scented Candle the Size of a Trash Can

We sat in a cemetery drinking a mixture of wine and bleach, with the sun as a light source, until everyone called me goth. We injected novocain into people's mouths in a sterile room, under fluorescent lights, until everyone called me a dentist. I wasn't really either of those things, I just thought if I did what you did I would understand why I will take the bus a great distance to see you, and why I don't care that you usually have no face, and when you do its only feature is a beard. Finally I replaced all the lights with an enormous candle whose scent of vanilla was so powerful all anyone could say was "My eyes are burning," and no one could see me kiss you.

What Engines Do

I make girls shove their fingers in my mouth until I feel like a car battery, which in some deafening, tireless darkness tirelessly knows only what fingers are. It is different than before, when I was some kind of priest or Taco Bell. Once, as a girl thrust three fingers into my mouth, almost choking me, she flipped on the light with her free hand, and there was nothing but a radiant parking lot, where it rained holy water and shredded lettuce.

The Weather

We smash each other into human shapes with the massive homogeny of our thoughts, whose only purpose, ever, has been to get each other's mouths open, and spit into them.

Drinking on the Street Naked

There is nothing better than drinking on the street naked. Once I was standing on the sidewalk naked at Green Lake, holding a beer. A large group of people rode past me on bicycles, and I yelled "Hello ladies!" They were obviously all men, but at that moment, everything was so beautiful it didn't matter.

Things That Aren't Real

Sometimes I think you're inventing drugs in order to pad your list of your addictions. You need to stop insisting on the existence of things that aren't real. The pathologically high value you place on my concern makes me feel like a grandmother, and not just your grandmother, but everyone's grandmother. Exhausted by the constant rocking chair-sitting, storytelling, and baking of cookies, my depth perception is affected to the point where I try to grab objects in the distance using only two fingers because I think they are tiny. Just admit you're addicted to dog tranquilizers like everyone else.

This House

I wasn't always able to smell this house. This was because I judged it. I judged it the way I judge myself, by breathing exclusively through my mouth, and sometimes by tying a damp rag around my face. I finally made the decision to stop judging myself, and now I not only smell the house, I have the confidence to be a combination of Britney Spears and smallpox.

That's Fun

My seven-foot-tall wife could smash me like a teacup, but my Mormon polygamy wives could strip my skeleton of flesh in seconds like those African driver ants. It's hard to tell which parts of my body are fingers anymore, but I still wish I had more fingers to put wedding rings on.

My Advocacy

I'm expected to advocate something, but I've decided to remain a heap of falling debris. It's not that I doubt my skills as an advocate--my clear, elegant arguments are the reason I'm known as "The Three Einsteins." It's just that advocating a specific thing is so limiting. As a heap of debris, about to drastically alter whatever it falls on, I constantly make countless arguments as profound as they are impossible to articulate.

Bombshell

I know I'm a man, with my bulldozer and my dozens of illegitimate children, and the way I explode in the microwave and glow under a black light, but all I really want is to be your pretty lady. I used to look in the mirror as a child and imagine myself as a princess, a princess with hair made of cotton candy like Princess Lolly from Candy Land--the kind of lady with a liquid metal exoskeleton and a hypotenuse whose length is impossible to calculate, who comes down the chimney once a year and metastasizes so quickly that radiation can't stop her.

Historical Figure

I made it here today, though my injuries are severe—my socks are both white but the shapes of the elastic parts reveal they are from different pairs; one of my eyebrow hairs has fallen out and I might never find it again. I made it here though, to this couch where people sit in silence. I sit there until it's even quieter--so quiet, if you take a quarter out of your pocket it will have nothing on it.

The Sign With Nothing On It

This blank sign in front of the motel was my favorite object in the neighborhood as a child. It is shaped like it meant to outline words, but it has been a solid gray-green for as long as I can remember.

“Look, it's the sign with nothing on it!” I yelled to my parents when we passed it in the car. After much thought about why a blank sign existed, I decided it must be art.

My uncle said, “Paintings of the crucifixion can be beautiful. That's the difference between a real crucifixion and a painting. That's why people make paintings.”

I imagined crucifixions were the popsicle truck colors of the neighbors' weathered plastic Jesus, and smelled like adults' coats after some event where it was necessary to sit down and be quiet.

The night my mom drove her car into the front yard, my uncle came all the way to our house. I was standing alone in the kitchen with the lights off, and he picked me up. My uncle who used to put his fake teeth in his belly button and make it talk to me.

Jump On Stage With a Blast From the Orchestra

“I’m having a bad night and don’t want to talk to anyone,” was my response when I got a Gchat message from an address I didn’t recognize. Then the video chat box opened, and there was a naked woman eating pistachio ice cream. The night was bad because I’d gone to a park where my first girlfriend took me once, and I noticed all the hedges were shaped like hearts. I’d always thought she took me there so no one would see us—to have known the shapes of those stupid hedges would have changed everything. “I want you to watch me eat this whole thing while you fuck yourself,” said the woman on the screen. She was eating ice cream with one hand while the other moved steadily between her thighs. She was about half way through the ice cream when I came, and the video box disappeared abruptly. Staring at the space where she had been, my pants around my knees, I remembered how my grandpa used to tell me to “Jump on stage with a blast from the orchestra.” I always thought he meant “Look for the silver lining,” but knew better than to use words like “look” or “for” or “lining.”

Aubade

I’ll live in any structure available.
I’ll shove my sleeping bag into a newspaper box,
and drag the box into a parking garage
so I can live in both at once.
I refuse to interact with a structure any other way.

When I tried just fucking somewhere,
it was like a sad country song.
When I tried just eating somewhere,
it was like a sad country song about breakfast.
The songs were barely audible
and seemed to come from nowhere,
I could only endure them if I imagined
everyone who had ever lived in those places was with me.

I’ve gotten good at living in things,
but I like it best when all the things go away—
like the morning we woke up on a cement floor
where neither of us lived,
on a street white with frost
that disappeared in a white cloud.

Everything was gone but us sad country singers,
and somewhere an audience cheered and cheered.

Nietzsche's Glasses

I'm practically blind
without my reading glasses.
They have neon green plastic frames
and say "PA" in the right lens and "RTY" in the left,
exactly like the pair Nietzsche had.

I send you a picture of myself wearing
them while reading "The Portable
Nietzsche," and hope you'll laugh.
I'm naked in the picture though you can't see
behind that big book.

I'm sick—have been for days—
and as the sun goes down
at 5 pm behind a frozen
bird shit-covered pagoda,
I think about bodies,
ridiculous wet bottle rockets
that fall off the sticks.

The first time we danced
in a blue-black room, we tripped
over each other and kissed
so hard our teeth clashed.
Then, close enough to see
each other,
we immediately did both again.

Then, the street lamps turn on,
the same yellow as the tiny leaves
that glowed through the blue-black spring night
when I first heard David Bowie,
and I want you to see exactly that yellow
that could either be color or light.

Mystery Object

You come out of the room where everyone is doing karaoke
and ask why I'm ignoring you.

I want to say something that suggests I've endured
some exotic, indescribable torture

but a completely mundane thing has happened,
which is you have stopped loving me.

So, even though your body is here, you are gone
and bodies are becoming less like a procession of individuals
than a texture of wet cement, but also like words that say,
"Would you subscribe to the mystery object"

and I think, it's funny the cement forms words, especially these words
but something isn't right about the word "subscribe" in this context
and I can't tell if the sentence is a question or a statement –
Why is there no punctuation?

I want to run, but I'm already travelling in every direction at once.

Objects' Proportions

The only time she was told she looked sad, she was thinking about shellacking a miniature
pineapple, and the only time she was told she looked confident, she was choking on an oversized
marshmallow. She began searching for normal-sized objects in hopes she would not be
misunderstood, but the more she searched, the more unusual objects' proportions appeared, and
the stronger the only feeling she had ever had became. The streets seemed to be filling with
people she had touched.

My Own Razor

I learned from a web site how to make a disposable razor from common household items. If I
made my own razor, I would shave every hair off my body. When I do something, I do it until
everyone is bald. In an age when everyone instantly knows how to do everything, do you want
me to do what everyone does? Do you want it done fast, or do you want it done until you're
completely hairless?

Parking Lot

When a dentist told me all my teeth would fall out if I didn't stop clenching them, I asked how to make everyone else's teeth fall out. I ask everyone I meet this question, but the dentist was the first one to respond by taking my pants off. We stared hopefully at each other until the dentist said, "Give them a lot of candy," and escorted me to a parking lot where several other half-naked people were walking to their cars.

Your Hand In Space

Your accidentally photocopied hand in the dark margin of an article made me like the photocopy, and then the whole room, and then everything else. When I lived by a train yard, I sometimes wanted to jump on a random train and ride it as far as it would go. This was stupid, because if the train didn't cut my legs off, it would probably end up in Pittsburgh. If my hands looked like yours did in the photocopy, I think I would at least know where I wanted the train to go. Your hand floated in space with the white specks in the toner, your fingers actually touching the words on the page.

The Sign Said *Ladies Night*

no cover for all ladies wearing the same dress. \$2 tequila shots, threatening smile competition at 9pm.

There were only three ladies in the bar, and their smiles did not seem threatening enough to warrant a competition. In fact, I got the impression they were incapable of any other facial expressions.

The bar had a rodent problem—gophers, I think. For some reason, perhaps the lighting, it was impossible to tell what size anything was, so some of the gophers looked alarmingly small and some of them seemed the size of cars. The tiny ones were worse.

There were no visible objects in the bar, so if there really was tequila, I couldn't find it. I think I slipped while looking for the bathroom. I say "I think," because I had the sensation of falling, but there was no ensuing impact with anything I'd call a floor. As a couch-sized gopher lurched past me, I realized for the first time in my life, I really felt like the lady for whom a "Ladies Night" was intended.

The Room of Disembodied Excitement

No one wants to know about your
publications or your missing fingers or your
Dodge Charger. They have been waiting
all night, perhaps all their lives,
to tell you why their sister is a bitch.

No one wants to hear the nervous catalogue
of anecdotes that mean "I like you,"
they would like to know if
the beers in the kitchen are free.
Their sister just sent them another
text subtly mocking their apartment.

Do you really like this person
or does it just comfort you
to sleep next to someone?
You once thought sleeping near your parents,
even if the closest you could get
was the bedroom floor,
would ensure they lived through the night.

You remember Tom of Finland said,
"If I don't have an erection
when I'm visiting a museum,
I know it's no good,"
and you love the idea
of a room of disembodied excitement.

You take out a sharpie and draw a perfect ass
on the face of the person you're talking with.
The lines extend to the edges
of their face, and onto the wall, and into
the air. They spread farther and farther
until you can't see the ends anymore.

From Under the Ground

She said she gave you a kite string
because nothing ever lasts.
As you bury it in the park
I worry I'll say something that stupid myself.

I once gave a woman a jar of dirt
from a hill that was in my dreams,
and told her she was the seam
between dreams and reality. Was that worse?

I gave another a toilet chain
from an abandoned house that I kept
to remind myself I'm brave, and told her
I didn't have to be brave with her.

Stainless steel and rocks,
I would have stayed with them forever.
I met a guy who's afraid of carbon fiber bicycles,
because they'll outlast him.

Did a similar fear
make those women leave?

When you're on top of me,
I think of Jean Genet being fucked
by a convict, how the man "unfurled
on him like a leaden branch"

though you'd be a living branch, maybe a pear tree,
with those little white flowers
whose petals stick to the dark twigs when it rains.

A craftsman of contexts for the beauty

of toilet chains and dirt, I'm silent
in the presence of beauty
that requires no context, and giddy

as anyone who has just learned
why people give each other flowers.