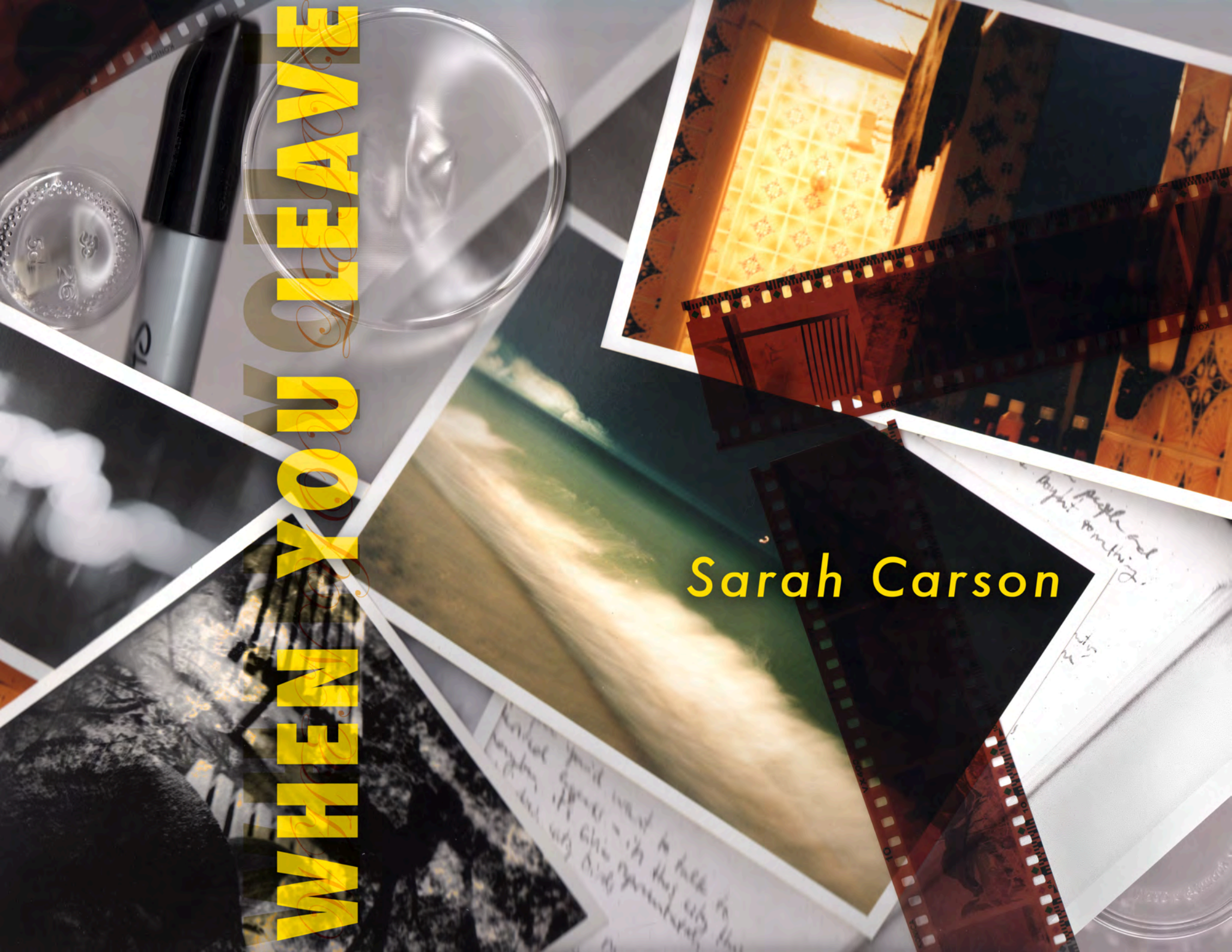


# WHEN YOU LEAVE

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I.

When you leave I spend several hours sawing off my right hand. My mother calls the cops who come to the back door instead of the front. They ask if I'm alright, and I say I am, so they feed the cat some cheerios and head back to their car through the snow. I watch them go from the window, then I begin to remove your things from the shower.

II.

I go to church and ask God if I can borrow the surveillance tape from the day I sat with you while you cried in the Lou Malnati's parking lot. He says I'm being ridiculous, and I need to go home, but I don't. Instead, I go to the first place where the sun's gone down and stand there pretending it has always been this way.

III.

I hear you start seeing someone else, and I go to find her. It is late at night and I stand outside her building and I buy one of those background checks on the Internet and I can't find her cell phone number so I run her credit. It is impeccable.



IV.

I wait several days and storm back into God's office. He is very busy doing paperwork because of North Korea or cancer or a hurricane. I say, "I think he took her to the planetarium. He never took me to the planetarium."

"You've been to lots of planetariums," God replies.

V.

I go to talk to the tent we were supposed to get married in. I explain to her the situation, and she listens politely but does not seem surprised. "Listen," she says, "These things happen. Have a drink. You'll get over it."

"No," I tell her. "You don't understand."

VI.

At work the next day your new girlfriend gets up to use the copier, and I check her e-mails for punctuation. I watch her shoes in my peripheral vision, and I think quiet, brooding thoughts about the way her heels hit the floor.

VII.

I read a book that details how to make yourself very small, and I ask your new girlfriend if I can stay inside her ear. She says, "Ok but only for a minute" because she doesn't know about how I turn minutes into hours. I end up staying for days listening to you telling her how beautiful she is, how much the stars make you sure you are in love.

VIII.

I go into the woods and find an old man sitting on a log that is still wet from the melting snow. I begin to cry so he puts his hand on my shoulder and says, "I've heard these things happen, you know," and then I cry some more.

IX.

When your new girlfriend leaves to use the restroom, I kick over her briefcase. I think about calling the numbers in her blackberry. I google her. I find pictures of her she didn't know existed.

X.

I use some markers I find to draw a picture of you and me holding hands and then I use some scissors I find to cut us apart. I go back to God and show him what I've done. This time he is using one of those calculators that prints receipts to do some important math, and he only glances at my drawing before saying, "Sissy, you don't look anything like that."

XI.

I go to one of many apple orchards you never took me to. I stand there a long time hoping someone will talk to me. The ground gets soft, and I begin to sink in and a bird makes a nest in my hair. She lays some eggs, and her babies hatch and use my ears as ledges to practice their flying. "This is fine," I say. "This is what I wanted anyway."



XII.

In line at the automatic hand dryer, your new girlfriend is taking her time. I examine the curliness of her hair. I make a decision about it, and this decision is definitive. She turns and smiles a shy hello, and I pretend I don't see her, that I've never seen her.

XIII.

I go back to God who is mucking out a flooded basement. I ask him what his fucking problem is and he turns and sighs and says, "What is yours?"

I tell him everyone has begun to look like you.



Sarah Carson was born and raised in Flint, Michigan but now lives in Chicago. She is also the author of the chapbooks *Before Onstar* (Etched Press, 2009) and *Twenty-Two* (Finishing Line Press, 2010).