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Fall Out Girl

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Abstract:
(relationships, desire, love)

This thesis explores the presence of prose writing techniques and their application in poetry. I attempt to examine through narrative poetry—along with a few other styles—how elements of fiction are not tools limited to novels and short stories. To accomplish this I explore the dynamics of relationships, love, and desire. By focusing on aspects of these large and broad subjects, I hope to highlight the art of storytelling through poetry.

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

FALL OUT GIRL

By

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Table of Contents

<i>Dedication</i>	5
<i>Section I</i>	
Pillow Thoughts.....	8
Stuck.....	9
Ode to Pretty Suited Soldier Sailor Moon, the Chicken.....	10
Why I Never Talk During Dinner.....	11
A Dog Left Me Behind.....	12
Live a Little.....	13
Fuck Me in the Library.....	15
The Romantic's Manifesto: an Abecedarian.....	16
Poem for the Girl Who Will Forget Me When She's Famous.....	17
My Poem Knows What You Do in the Dark.....	18
Sonnet 45.....	19
To the Woman Who Never Wanted to be Married.....	20
Letter to the Girl Sitting Across from Me at the Bar.....	22
<i>Section II</i>	
The Burnt-out Bulb.....	24
I've Got a Baseball and a Bad Idea.....	25
Proof.....	26
Strip Tease.....	27
When I was Younger, I Thought I was a Ghost.....	29
The Nature of the Beast.....	31
My Fingernails.....	33
Where You Go When She Speaks.....	34
Slept With a Write and All I Got Was This Stupid Poem.....	37
Renovations of 2003.....	38
Magic 8-Ball.....	40
Downtown Disney.....	41
25mg of December.....	43
To the Man with the Power to Kiss Boo-boos Better.....	44

Dedication

For writers there is never a truly “finished” work—at least for me. I am always tinkering, editing, revising, and the process will end only when I’m six feet under. But here in this collection are poems I call finished (for now), and I could not have completed them without the support and patience of my professors. Thank you to David Kirby and James Kimbrell, who put up with me through revisions; to Donna Marie, who took a chance on me (and my poetry); to Katie Knoll, who sacrificed many a weekend to edit countless drafts; to my friends Ondrej, Elle, Alicia, Danny, Rachel, for humoring me through countless self-pity parties; to Nika, Erin, Christy, Jennine (and many more past teachers) for an availability and willingness to read whatever I put in front of them; to Jeffrey Cranor and Joseph Fink (the writers of *Welcome to Nightvale*) and Fall Out Boy for being a fountain of inspiration; to my family, who also is a spring of writing material; and lastly, to my darling Lauren, who—despite my sometimes psychotic behavior at various points in the writing process—still loves me unconditionally.

For O.L.O.

I. We're goin' down.

"Once you find laughter, no matter how painful
your situation might be, you can survive it."

—Bill Cosby

Pillow Thoughts

It's 2:07am and I'm lying in bed wondering
 if you like me or you *like like* me. And is it even
me that you like or the Casanova I pretend to be?
 How would you react if you knew my confidence

comes from a lie I tell myself—*everyone is in love*
with me until proven otherwise—instead of
 self-actualization? Would you still think
 I'm "charming" if I told you I shake my hips when

I'm happy, the way a dog wags its tail? What if you
 knew I won a competition when I was eight for having
 the smelliest fart? Do you care that I only own four pairs
 of pants and twenty-six t-shirts? If I admitted to having

separation anxiety when you leave, even if it's only
 to pee, would you find me romantic or neurotic?
 Have you realized, yet, that I squeak at the end
 of every yawn when I want attention?

How long do you think it'll take until you're overwhelmed
 by my constant need of praise? Would learning
 that I only brush my teeth for four rounds of "Row Your Boat,"
 instead of the recommended two minutes, gross you out?

If you saw me army crawl in the dirt at Lake Ella
 to pounce on some ducks, would you ditch me when
 I'm not looking? Would you still think I'm "clever"
 if I told you I don't know where Indiana is on a map

or how to spell "garauntee" (without spell check)
 or I sometimes forget that E comes before F in the alphabet?
 What would your final verdict of me be:
 Don Juan or Don Quixote?

Stuck

Susan, on the day after your funeral,
my IBS acted up. I ran out of toilet paper
and there was only one magazine.

I read in the Reader's Digest you bought that
ice cream activates the same pleasure center as falling in love.

I bought all the ice cream in stock
from six stores in town, even the kind I hate:
Butterscotch Caramel Chunk, your favorite.

There's enough ice cream to fill our empty pool,
but I still can't call you from the bathroom
and cry, "I forgot the toilet paper."
or hear you say,
"I'll pick some up on my way home."

Ode to Pretty Suited Soldier Sailor Moon, the Chicken

I.

You think she's just a chicken, but to me she's a *real* woman,
 the kind of girl who prefers sitting on a guy's lap to standing
 in front of a vanity mirror. Sailor coos when I peck the top

of her head with a kiss and wake her from a nap. She smells
 silky like tomato vines, tastes bitter from the August sun.
 Her legs are pockmarked from hours of kneeling in earth,

and her nails are painted with black soil. When she's asleep
 in the crook of my neck, I feel rich—like the way apple cider
 smells on a winter morning in Langdon, North Dakota,

when the steam swirls above my mug, while I rock on Momma's
 porch swing waiting for the dawn to turn the prairie grass rainbow-colored.
 (Well, more like a blanket of snow half-rainbow. Only indigo hues.)

II.

Before Sailor, no one watched the mornings with me,
 not even Mary Ann—the only girl I went steady with.
 She said things like *Don't you do anything else besides sitting*

*or painting the same sunrise? or Folding laundry is more exciting
 than you.* (She broke up with me after a week, to date her second cousin,
 who made wood barrels for a living.) Though I'm no cooper,

Sailor makes me feel like I'm the finest barrel-maker
 of day-break daydreams. We speak different languages,
 my girl and I, but we're as happy as hibernating bears.

III.

My girl taught me how to say *I love you* in her dialect.
 I taught her *Where's the bathroom* in mine. Even though
 I'm a painter, I'm no good at painting a picture with words,

especially in the heat of the moment. But I'll keep trying
 my hand at romance because my chicken will always love me,
 even on the mornings the sun calls in sick.

Why I Never Talk During Dinner

I'm sitting across from you, silent, and my only concern
 is your breasts and where a third nipple would be
 if you had one. I wonder: if all women had three breasts,
 would men have a third hand too? Did the number of boobs

dictate the number of arms, or did the number of arms determine
 the number of boobs? Evolution is a matter of what comes first.
 The arm's establishment in the genetic timeline is earlier
 than the mammary glands, the hand must have influenced

the number of breasts—after all, natural selection revolves around sex.
 Putting aside the issue of offspring, when choosing a mate,
 breast number had to have factored in for Garrl the Cro-Magnon.
 Men (and women too) can't stand being inadequate

or overwhelmed, especially when it comes to sex. With only two hands,
 one breast is going to be left out; alternating between all three is one option,
 but if Garrl forgets one in the rotation, everything'll go to hell—
 a boob is neglected; a woman is unsatisfied; a Garrl is discouraged

and thinking mid-thrust: HRRRMPPFF UUUGH HH URRNNHURN
 (which translates to *I should have gone to Olga's cave*). So, the three-breast
 chromosome is filtered out of the gene pool, all thanks to man's ego
 and lack of a third hand—which is fine by me, since I can't find

an aesthetically pleasing place on your chest for a third nipple to be,
 never mind another breast. For once, I don't mind being a woman
 in a "man's world" because man's preference produced the feminine form,
 and the only thing I've contributed to the human existence is
 a daydream about your chest.

A Dog Left Me Behind

I am a piece of shit, pungent
as vomit, delivered by Jesus
the dog to your suburban lawn.

I am married to your yard,
transferred with a precious dowry
rich in vitamin currency.

I am gifted with knowledge: wise
to your wife's affairs and the neighbor
who steals water from your hose.

I am trampled by your inattentive
stride, guts stuck on the white trim of
a shoe, missing remains stolen by you.

I am cursed as the ruin of your
sole and sentenced without proper trial.
My crime? Guilty of defacement.

I am poor because you robbed me
of my wealth, prevented my transformation
and higher purpose: a calcium shell.

I am divorced from your yard,
no worm will have me, and the grass
won't be greener after I'm gone.

Live a Little

1.

“Anyone got a cig?”

 I ask a group of nurses
 on benches outside a hospital.
 But none of them do.

2.

The nurses have converted
 to electronic cigarettes,
 so they don’t feel guilty
 about their second-hand smoke.
 (Because what about the children!)
 Fuck the children.
 And the soldiers, too.

3.

Outside, I’m stuck
 bumming around in a white gown
 that flashes my crack if I bend over,
 has pastel splashes and spots
 like a bad Pollock,
 is statistically proven to
 increase a patient’s overall joy.

4.

Sacred Heart Hospital:
 where I can’t have marijuana,
 but I can paint my feelings,
 drink morphine with my breakfast,
 lunch, but not dinner.
 I spend dinner throwing up
 breakfast and lunch.

5.

I’ve stared down my bowl so long,
 I notice Blarrfengarr, the toilet ghost,
 arranging my puke again,
 telling me *Ouija board*
 or *Oui? Ja bored?*

6.

“Well, can I get a Ouija board at least?”
I ask the nurses. They stare back,
dumb, like fish.
“Not for me. For the ghost in my toilet.”
They escort me to my room
and call my younger brother, Ricky, to tell him:
Marge is experiencing severe cognitive dysfunction.

7.

I don't have chemo-brain.
My only dysfunction is being unable
to comprehend why the staff
in this hospital won't leave
a cancer patient to her vices.

8.

I sneak into the waiting room,
and find a janitor with a pack
of Marlboros in his breast pocket.
I lead him to the bathroom,
flash my tits for a cig—
the craziest thing I've ever done.

9.

That cigarette tasted like
the day before I found the lump.

Fuck Me in the Library

—but not really. Libraries are a sacred place to me,
and in mine I can escape 24/5 to the forgotten aisles

of gender theory or quantum mechanics or poetry.
Here I hide: between the authors whose talent

I attempt to absorb through osmosis or black magic,
whichever helps me write my papers; amongst

sorority girls updating their statuses; untouched
books of Asian politics; an empty study room

on the third floor where you could lift me on the desk,
slide a hand down my pants, cover my mouth with

the other while I try to keep my eyes open long enough
to count the dots on the ceiling, to keep my thoughts

focused on where your lips are—instead of my fear
of getting caught by a patrolling librarian, ready to call

the police to arrest us. Before I have time to finish
the daydream, my pencil splinters in my mouth.

I move to a floor with no study rooms, sit with
my back against Nabokov, to feel the ice of Russia

instead of your hands, to stop thinking about
what you could be doing to me in room 327F—

where we'd thaw glaciers, and our hearts will pump,
not blood, but vodka, the expensive kind.

The Romantic's Manifesto

*after being told "Poets shouldn't write like the Romantics anymore.
It's too flowery, and no one likes to read that."*

Amorous authors are abated without protest, replaced by voguish talents—
bard à la mode. I, here, indict those reveling in a fallacy of success,

“contemporaries” of poetry who manipulate metaphors in the name of
dime-a-dozen trends. You, Children of the Pen, who seek only fame,

excise sentiment from humanity in your misguided quest of poetic
fanfare. How many—orphaned by critics’ “cultured” taste—must

give up their outdated philosophy or be recorded and catalogued, filed
history? Byronic heroes, your habits will lead only to extinction.

I issue a call to arms: draw your pens, man your typewriters—
keys clacking, clicking anthems in centuries old rhetoric—lyrics

lost on youthful ears—like Keats’ aria: *He ne'er is crowned with
immortality, who fears to follow where airy voices lead*. Retort?

“No.” Critics carve our only niche: graves for melodramatic lament.
O you fortunate few, writers who have somehow survived your souls,

popular poets allied with trend—blending views but not clichés—
queer, is it not, that you, who haven’t sold your romanticism,

raise no argument for your fellow’s defense? *Exister pour nous, c'est
sentir*. Will you mercilessly condemn your kind to a forgotten literary

tomb? Yet worse still: you jack-of-all-trades. You meek, adaptable lot
ungoverned by any era’s tone, whose plastic prattle and linguistics

verbalize what fashion dictates; you search society, not yourself.
Write of out injustice, Darwinian scribes, and champion imagination!

Xenophobes, ye need naught despise our antiquated rhyme. Ask thyself:
why such shun? Are we not writers in every way: spirit, bone, and blood?

Zounds! For all you gentle romantics who’ve been oppressed, I yawp.

Poem for the Girl Who Will Forget Me When She's Famous

I want to write a poem that fills the page like
your voice fills your room. You've never opened

for Nora Jones or the Rolling Stones or any band
that's graduated from their garage, but when I watch

you play from your twin-sized bed, you're center stage
at the Grand Ole Opry, while I'm perched in the balcony

hoping mine is still the face you scan for in-between songs.
Listening to you makes me feel warm and happy inside—

like that moment when the pizza delivery guy finally arrives,
hands me the box, and I feel the heat radiating through the cardboard.

You leave me in a trance—a Thanksgiving-dinner-
food-coma-for-a-week kind of daze, but I don't regret

a single spoonful since my favorite part is afterwards:
lying naked with you on the couch because we couldn't make it

to the bed. I want my words to black out the paper
they're printed on, so you won't be able to slip past me,

sneak past the white space of paragraphs, squeeze through
the holes of O's and A's and B's and P's because I hate it

when you walk inside at the end of the night,
and I wonder *is that anything I can to keep you*

as I'm left standing on the steps of your apartment.

My Poem Knows What You Do in the Dark

After work I watch you walk Maria,
still in an Olive Garden uniform, to her car.

Your hand follows the line of her spine
down to the small of her back, while your

eyes linger on the spot where she spritzed
Chanel No. 5 (between her clavicles)

the same way a boy stares when he
watches his best friend's sister undress

through a cracked door, from the hallway.
You envision Maria, waiting on a bed,

wearing a slip that wrinkles at her hips,
forms grooves in the gown, then the places

your tongue imagines her copper skin
tastes like jasmines, now crawling into bed

next to her, kissing every freckle—
from the bottom of her right foot

up to the one behind her ear. I leave
after watching you and her drive off.

You come home later than usual
with your clothes stinking of sweat,

garlic, and all the dishes you bused for Maria.
I taste jasmines when you kiss me goodnight.

Sonnet 45*By Pablo Neruda***45**

No estés lejos de mí un solo día, porque cómo,
 porque, no sé decirlo, es largo el día,
 y te estaré esperando como en las estaciones
 cuando en alguna parte se durmieron los trenes.

No te vayas por una hora porque entonces
 en esa hora se juntan las gotas del desvelo
 y tal vez todo el humo que anda buscando casa
 venga a matar aún mi corazón perdido.

Ay que no se quebrante tu silueta en la arena,
 ay que no vuelen tus párpados en la ausencia:
 no te vayas por un minuto, bienamada,

porque en ese minuto te habrás ido tan lejos
 que yo cruzaré toda la tierra preguntando
 si volverás o si me dejarás muriendo.

45

Don't go far from me, not for a single day, because how—
 because—I don't know how to say it. The day is long,
 and I will be waiting for you in the stations
 somewhere, even when the trains sleep.

Don't leave for an hour, because then,
 in that hour, the drops of sleeplessness come together,
 and perhaps all the smoke that roams, searching for a home,
 will come to kill even my lost heart.

O may your silhouette never dissolve in the sand.
 O that your eyelids never flutter into the empty distance.
 Don't go, not even for a minute, my beloved,

because in that moment you'll have gone far enough
 that I would cross the entire earth, asking
 if you'll come back or if you'll leave me dying.

I change details of our pasts:
we meet in high school so neither of us has to learn
what it means to be alone.

I plot points in possible futures:
I win the lotto, use the money to publish your first book,
(which receives critical acclaim) and ensure
you'll live forever through Times New Roman font.

I imagine our separate realities, too:
we fade from each other over the years,
like ink on carbon paper.
On your 67th birthday I decide to surprise you,
after decades of silence.
I wonder why I can't find you in the phone book.

My dying thought is curiosity:
did you ever miss me, even once?

Sometime in the middle of these parallel lives,
before I fall asleep, I whisper ingredients
to the empty room and wonder if
your fear of falling is finally cured.

Letter to the Girl Sitting Across From Me at the Bar

I.

You don't want to be *that girl*—too drunk to stumble to the bathroom stall, who cries at her table instead, who carves phone numbers, death threats, and WILLIE NELSON+JESSICA CONNORS 4 EVER into the wooden table top because your as-of-two-days-ago ex-girlfriend hated Willie, and never let you listen to him. So fuck it. She'll love him forever now.

II.

My granddad always told me, "If you don't like what a woman's saying, kiss her 'til she forgets about it." I'm not good with *there*, *there's* or *my condolences*, but I'm great at lying my way out of speeding tickets, cooking chicken cordon bleu, changing flat tires, kissing girls until they forget.

III.

Use me like a credit card. Max out your balance and never worry about paying off your debt. Buy yourself the attention you deserve, time alone, some movie nights with me. Late nights where I can't see the screen because I'm charmed by the architecture of your face, how your jaw curves to make your lower lip protrude—a permanent pout.

IV.

Everyone needs to clean house once in a while, a fling before moving on. I promise, I'm convenient. Don't leave me at the curb with the trash, though, with everything that smells like her. Here comes the garbage truck, and look, it's me—I'm driving.

II. Just rub some dirt in it.

“Broken promises
hanging from rooftops
like strings of Christmas lights
with one bulb burnt out
and you can’t find the spot where
it all began to unravel.”

—*Anna Peters*

The Burnt-out Bulb

I test each Christmas light until the strand flicks on again.
 The burnt-out bulb rolls across my palm like a film reel,
 projecting frame after frame of high school days.
 I'm watching when we promised to be friends forever:
 I keyed the trunk of a crape myrtle during the summer
 of our freshman year. You whistled *Pinball Wizard*

next to me, oblivious to my whittling,
 while strips of bark curled like pear skin,
 forming ribbons, before drifting down onto the grass.
 I tapped your shoulder to show you the graffiti: *LM+AH*.
 You took my key, deepened the lines, trying to make sure
 our initials would outlast names, hand prints,

and declarations of love written in the cracked
 sidewalks nearby. What you didn't know then
 was that you were the one who wanted only our friendship
 to last forever (I wanted more). I waited for you to leave—
 so I could carve a heart around our initials—
 because I was foolish enough to believe

I was writing a prophecy: high school sweet-hearts
 who become Mr. & Mrs. The bulb settles in the center
 of a hand you never held—but I bet we're still
 together on the bark of that tree.

I've Got a Baseball and a Bad Idea

I swallowed a baseball because I was thinking of you again.

I'll admit: it's pretty high up on the stupidity scale—
right above the time I tried to snort a blue raspberry Pixie Stix,

but below the time I jumped out a third-story window
to test if an umbrella worked as well as a parachute.

Now each breath is a challenge: my lungs versus the ball.

I imagine this is what an Adam's apple feels like:

a constant bulge, too lazy to outright suffocate a man,
but too large to be ignored; it might explain why my brother

cried so much during hide-and-seek, why my ex-boyfriend
used to beat me, or why my father tells me he's considering
suicide each time I call home—because trying to breathe

gets old and stale, like the eighth beer I couldn't finish tonight,
the one I left on the kitchen counter. When I gulp, the baseball
doesn't budge, just wedges itself deeper in my throat,

gripping with raised red laces—official MLB stitching.
The only good thing that's come from this is oxygen deprivation,
giving my brain tunnel vision so I can push you out of my head

and focus on more important questions, like finding out
if there's enough cork in baseballs to satisfy
the doctor's daily recommend serving: 25 grams of fiber.

Proof

Remember, Mom, when you told me I couldn't do anything right?
 I had to refold an entire household's laundry over again because
 they weren't folded your way—which doesn't seem like much now.
 but I was six. You called me *spoiled* when I refused to finish my dinner,
 didn't let me leave the table until I finished my plate—
 I put my head down where I sat and slept in the kitchen.
 For that, I was *insolent twerp*. You took away my tenth birthday
 a week before the party, to prove that *being a brat gets you nothing*.
 I went to school with the apology notes you made me write to friends
 who'd already RSVPed. The first time you told me I was a waste of money
 was a Saturday. I placed in a regional horse show, rode up to you and Dad,
 presented my prize: a pastel yellow, silk ribbon big as my head;

it had white strands that blew in the wind like my horse's tail.
Half a grand for some fabric. It's not like you paid the entry fee,
 but your forced smile in every picture sure made it seem that way.
 I spent two months of ninth grade grounded (I did my homework
 before your laundry). You took the books from my room as punishment
 because I enjoyed reading too much. *All the other kids your age have a plan,*
but you haven't got a clue; I was grounded until I researched colleges,
 careers, and made a plan. I wrote the Vorticist manifesto—
 BLAST and BLESS list included—in black Sharpie on my walls.
 You told me I was *desperate for attention* while I was hospitalized.
 The bed sheets, the pills, and the bandages on my wrists: all white.

During visiting hours you sat beside me, explaining what's wrong with me,
 making sure I understood *how selfish I was being, by doing what I'd done*—
 I seemed to split the difference between your ex-husband and Uday Hussein.
 The hospital's hay-colored walls proved more consoling than you.
 When was the last time you told me you loved me? I know a video camera
 recorded the first time: at our first home. The hospital bracelet
 and pink sock cap was still on. You cradled me in the crook
 of your arm, pulled the cloth from my head, kissed my nose,
 said *her skin smells like oatmeal*. You whispered *I love you*,
 and, supporting my head, lowered me into my crib.

Strip Tease

I miss you the most
in the middle,
in moments of transition—

the black borders
framing each picture
on a film strip. My finger

traces circles,
drawing patterns
on cotton sheets,

trying to summon you
through sorcery.
I stare at the stars

you can't see—
glow-in-the-dark stickers
arranged into constellations

on my ceiling.
I assign them meaning as if
I were a Grecian

connecting the dots
of history. In the corner,
above my headboard

is Christoven,
patron of the unwitting;
between the closet

and the door is Flora,
a personification,
like the Muses,

embodying random acts
of kindness.
I spend my nights

creating myths,
waiting for you to call,
because I'm childish,

an insomniac who
needs bedtime stories
to fall asleep.

In moments of anxiety—
before you answer
the phone and I'm counting

each ring; when I remember
you're not waiting
for me at my apartment;

the pause between
I love you and *I love you too*—
the distance makes me

nauseous. Gravity yanks
on my organs like
I'm a bell in Notre Dame

rung to signal mass.
I give up voodoo magic
to hold my aching stomach.

Beginnings are temporary,
not to mention commonplace,
and happy endings

are all the same:
John and Mary die.
I miss you the most

when there's no plot
or dialogue; when I whisper
our story to stick-on-stars;

when the only sound
is a steady breathing
from the phone,

letting me know
you fell asleep first this time.

When I was Younger, I Thought I was a Ghost

I have this problem where I start to become invisible,
and if I just let the vanishing run its course

I can disappear completely. The first time it happened
I was six, and walking home from school.

I patted the plastic pink flamingo on my way inside,
kicked the front door shut, and the *squaboom*

of rusty hinges and maple announced: *Hey mom and dad,*
I'm home! The house was hushed.

Dad wasn't in the kitchen. Mom wasn't in the living room.
I stood at one end of the hall when I saw

a shoe whiz from the bedroom at the opposite end
and rebound off the door to the garage;

a watch, a book, a lamp and Hobee the cat followed after,
each landing with a *thud* before falling to the floor.

My dad came out next, suitcase in hand, and slipped
into the garage. He didn't notice at me.

My mom chased after him, yelling from the doorway:
that's right, Michael, run away. Fucking loser!

The garage door ground open and a car engine revved.
The machines muted my mother's voice. She looked the same

as *The Sopranos*, the parts when I have to hold my ears.
But this muting? This was different—not silent, just loud.

No matter how hard I jammed my palms against
my head, the ringing stung as if a roadie railed

the volume on a microphone, and a sharp *eeEEEEeaaEEeerk*
sailed from the speakers. The noise drowned out

my voice, too, when I tried to yell *shut up, shut up, shut up, shut up!*
Only the doors heard me; they leapt alive with

a supernatural energy—the same way plates sometimes do
when a spirit is angry, throwing themselves from

cabinet shelves. The garage and bedroom door swung
their dense oak bodies shut, shielding me.

I wasn't aware of the silence at first
(ghosts sometimes forget sensory things),

but the quiet tapped my shoulder, to let me know
it was safe to uncover my ears. In the lull I stood,

but the watch, the book, the lamp, and Hobe the cat did not.
A gleam of light reflected through the kitchen window.

From my spot, I saw my dad's champagne-colored Civic
backing out, but he didn't see me waving at him to stop.

By the window, I noticed my skin matched the color of glass
and when I lifted my shirt to look down at my stomach,

the process sped up, aware it had an audience. Transforming
took only a minute—as if to say to me via speed

thank you for your time. It didn't hurt, only tickled as I watched:
my body shook, folded in on itself, and turned clear.

The Nature of the Beast

When I wake, you are gone
 like a magician's assistant.
 The air cooled your side of the sheets.
 My mouth dries to sandpaper
 and a rock blocks my throat.

Maybe the bulge is an Adam's apple
 and this is another of those dreams
 where I've been transformed into a man.
 I touch my throat. I'm not dreaming.

I feel my way through the dim,
 listening for sounds other than
 the refrigerator, hit my knee
 on the coffee table, limp to the place
 where I don't want to find you.

Despite years of atheism,
 I act on instinct and pray to St. Anthony:
*grant that I may find my love, who has
 been lost. Let me find her reading in the tub
 or brushing her teeth or asleep on the toilet, again.*

I open the bathroom door.
 You're sitting in the tub,
 back turned to me. Your skin's
 white as linoleum, stained like
 your mom's carpet after I spilt
 wine on it last Thanksgiving.

I can't believe I mistook a pillow for you,
 as if there was no difference
 until somehow, in my sleep, I noticed:
 what I'm hugging is three feet too short;
 the warmth, from my body; the jasmine
 perfume is not the scent of your skin—
 which smells like a beach front bakery,
 leaves the taste of saltwater taffy on my tongue.

Your cuts aren't life threatening,
 but they're deep enough I feel them too.
 You stare up at me with *I'm sorry's*, but I don't
 forgive you—there's nothing to forgive.

Cutting the nature of the beast,
 which stuffs you plump like a teddy bear,
 but with pink insulation instead of cotton.

I understand because I used to cut myself
for the same reason: not to die,
but to be rid of the desire for death.

I take the scissors from your hand,
turn on the shower, wash the blood
from your body. You think I'm upset with you
so I try to smile the whole time. My hands
move like a nurse's, quick from routine.
I tend to your wounds with peroxide, stain another towel.
In the morning, I'll clean the bathroom, but for now
I walk you back to bed. This second time falling asleep,
you cry, so I hum until you're dreaming.
I used to be the one with trouble sleeping,
and you would whisper Tupac songs
as if they were a bed time story.

Drop the Mic

Last month my doctor
told me I'm infertile.
He also said I have diabetes.
I still listen to boy bands.
I watch the Princess Bride
before I make big decisions
like *should I kill myself today?*
Should I have a Monte Cristo
or a salad? Should I take
dance lessons? "My ex-girlfriend
had a really weird fetish.
She liked to dress up as herself
and then act like a fucking bitch
all the time" is a joke I stole
from a comedian I love more
than my own mother.

Where You Go When She Speaks

What is it that makes a mother? Her gift of life in your breath,
 a gift she left the price tag on (by accident); or her praise
 for your younger siblings who never talk-back? Riding home

from middle school, she goes on about something you stopped
 listening to thirty minutes ago. Instead, look for similarities
 between you and your siblings, hope to find none—proof enough

that you're adopted, that the hornet buzzing from the cell phone
 speaker is their mother, not yours. But, if the adoption theory
 were true, that means you have already been such a disappointment

some other mother couldn't stand to look at you. *You are not allowed
 to take French and I am enrolling you in an engineering program...*
 Put the phone on your leg. Resent yourself for being good at math.

In the front seat, your sister is blaring Fall Out Boy and your brother,
 who doesn't shower regularly or wear deodorant,
 is sleeping beside you in the back seat. The muggy, black-top

daycare parking lot waves at you with mirages, sent direct from
 August's afternoon sun. Don't pay attention to the half-cracked
 window—awareness only makes the oven worse. Watch the entrance

for signs of movement. Try not to be angry with your father,
 who has taken fifteen minutes so far—ten minutes longer
 than what's necessary—because it's too hot in the car to feel anything

except sweat beading on your lip, the breeze you imagine blowing
 through your window, or the keys in your father's pocket—
 not in the ignition. Look away from entrance, toward the toddlers playing

in the shade of the building, unfazed by the heat. Children are never affected
 by weather. You were like those kids once: hanging off the monkey bars
 of your elementary school's playground, invincible in the nipping air—

when the wind was so cold the sun's heat couldn't touch your skin.

You could run for hours, the autumn burning in your lungs
like you swallowed an ice cube whole, hurting your chest, stinging the front

of your brain, yet still you drop from the jungle gym to race

your friends to the back field, every kid praying, including you,
that their mothers forget about them because no one ever wants to leave first.

Your throat is hoarse from yelling *red rover, red rover,*

which is your favorite game because you get to hold
Morgan Blackwelder's hand. Finally, your youngest sister gets in the car,

stinking with pre-school—a mixture of sweat, mulch, and sawdust.

She's the reason you've waited so long (she didn't want to leave either),
but now won't wear her seatbelt because you don't have to wear one,

so why should she? Father yells: *You are supposed to be the example!*

Your half-sister still won't put her seatbelt on. Father shouts again:
Don't just sit there! Do something! Click your half-sister's into place.

You don't put on your belt. The car turns onto the road anyways,

accelerating past the speed limit. It's only then you remember
your mother is still on the phone, dictating your life (because she knows best).

Lift the phone to your ear and hear your mother announce

in a resolved, self-empowerment seminar voice that makes your
fingernails itch: *all you've done so far is show me that you will never*

amount to anything, and I refuse to support such poor decisions

any longer. Chew your nails. Don't try to respond. Put the phone
on the floor without bothering to hang-up or hide your face. If anyone cared

enough to look at you, it'd be too hot to tell if your cheeks were wet

with tears or sweat. Put your hand on the plastic door handle.

Hesitate—not from fear, but from precise Calculations. Wait for the lead-foot

behind to creep closer before you jump out. Maybe, if you don't mess this up,

your mother will tell you she's proud of you and hey!

this will show her just how good you are at math. Close your eyes.

Think about never crying, changing schools, or enduring a Florida summer again.

Pull the handle and push. But you forgot to ask to be excused,
so the door ignores you. Slump in the seat and wonder: what went wrong?

While you tally a mental list of faults. Somewhere around number fifty-six,
you realize: the door's stupid child lock is on.

Slept With a Writer and All I Got Was This Stupid Poem

I woke up this morning to find
the saliva still gone from
my tongue, my blue dress
on the floor, an empty bed.

Sometime between your line
to sleep when I'm with you
would be a waste of time
and my 8am alarm,

you filled my spine with cement
so I could not stand
and had to lie in the bed
you and I revised last night.

Renovations of 2003

I.

I study the curves of my body:
 a winding road of Spanish hips and thighs
 that drops off at the knee, exposes the sheer span

of my shin, which stretches out like a road
 until the length and the truth of where it ends,
 is swallowed by the horizon—which preserves

my curiosity. I continue to follow
 the road because I want to know what
 comes next in my life: do I learn what's on the other

side of a black hole? Co-star alongside
 Heath Ledger and Johnny Depp in
 a *Pulp Fiction* knockoff? See the Red Sox

break the Bambino's curse? I've lost
 my hope that tomorrow will be better;
 that when I wake, this sadness will slither away

suddenly, like it came, taking with it
 my knowledge, this road is a dead end;
 that I will believe this snaking trail leads somewhere,

even the Amazon—with its humid jungle;
 mosquito swarms clogging the air; useless,
 poison dart frogs that would kill me instead of the mosquitoes;

spiders, infesting every inch of forest—
 anything besides the repeating pattern of
 anticipation and anticlimax.

II.

I'm both architect and artist,
 contracted to make the outside match
 the in. I have many instruments, but my chisel

of choice: an X-Acto knife—
 picked to slice the finest lines. I work
 in the tub carving my arms, legs, stomach,

like a whittler working wood, etching
wounds that should heal into Pollock paintings.
Water washes away the waste made during remodeling—

which is great news because
I won't have to bother anyone else with this mess
or post a sign saying: *Under construction. Pardon our dust.*

Magic 8-Ball

I am full of *not quite*
just missed it, ask again.

I have the answers
to your questions—

“Will DiCaprio ever win an Oscar?”
Don't count on it.

“Is it okay if my poop is green?”
Reply hazy. Try again later.

“Should I get a XXXtreme Nachos?”
No. You have diabetes.

—but no one to answer mine:
will tomorrow be any better?

I thought I could make
my chronic despair go away

by letting the blue leak
from a crack in my side

or using couch change
to buy some company—

but it wasn't enough.
Go figure.

Downtown Disney

You call for help
I can't hear you

the phone disconnects us
are you dead like the dial tone

I can't clear my head
my selfish words buzz in stereo
a railed amp jarring

not now next weekend
I'm busy I can't
me me me me me

I'm in a migrained blur
and it's a small world after all

filled with indifferent tourists
all breathing in Mickey's Pixie Stix air

Your face is a polaroid
of the first Christmas morning you remember

Please remember to rendezvous here

My imagination rewrites memories
inserting nightmares
wondering if you know
our story ends

with fractured bones
in sinkhole quarries
decorated with hot metal
and your ashes swelling
on black carbon plumes

you call out
for me
for God

for help
for anybody please

and I can't wipe away
the pain of my last words
arguments and lies
slick and greasy
like Vaseline on your skin

it's just this last time
I won't use again

because I am still
sitting on a bench
in the happiest place on earth.

25mg of December

I.

Lined up on the table they look like
 Christmas lights
 on the gutters of your house, guiding Santa
 (and me) to milk and gingerbread.
 I wonder if the flavors match their colors—
 Pexeva, Abilify, Zoloft are really just
 cinnamon, eggnog, twenty-dollar merlot.

II.

You greet my family each December the same way
 you swallow your cocktail—
 with housewife hospitality and politician smiles.
 The performance is wrapping paper for a gift
 as traditional as fruitcake: Peace of Mind.

III.

The holidays should make you happy.
 When they don't,
 you hug Aunt Esprit anyways because she gave you
 (surprise!) a twelve-pack of light-up Rudolph socks.

How did you know I was down to my last pair?
 Wait for her to leave so you can add them to a drawer
 thirteen years full of socks you'll never wear.

IV.

You ask me every time the doctors
 change the recipe:
wanna see me set the record for most pills swallowed at once?
 I remember the nights you did and overdosed
 on the same ingredients you're sweeping into your hand.
 You laugh. I try (and fail).

V.

Toss five pills in your mouth sans agua,
 tongue acting like a conveyor belt
 to the back of your throat. I joke about the irony—
it's a shame that you're gay. You're every man's dream:
no gag reflex and you swallow. We laugh because
 there's no point in pouting over a lifetime supply
 of reindeer socks or days we both know
 the pills don't work.

Letter to the Man with the Power to Kiss Boo-boos Better

If an elephant loses its calf, it will visit
the last place they were together
until the calf comes back. Like you, Dad,
elephants have a hard time letting go,
make themselves sick with nostalgia.

I'd been in college for a year the first
time I was a visitor. I saw a bottle
of Ambien in place of the Batman statue
on your night stand. I don't know what
keeps you up at night, but when I was six,

I couldn't sleep either. You and Mom divorced,
a judge made a schedule of the days you could
see me—yet did nothing to limit the days
the poltergeist in the TV could scare me.
You made me a CD to help me sleep,

“The History of Ireland, from King Arthur
to World War II,” a version told by you,
because *poltergeists hate spicy food,*
and learning flavors your thoughts.
You were a magician. You had the power

to kiss boo-boos better, teleport Happy Meals
to school on days I forgot my lunch, teach me
your summoning spell: *If someone teases you,*
call my cell phone. I'll be at your school
in five minutes, and I'll kick their ass.

I forget the last time I called to say “I love you,”
but I don't need to be an elephant to remember
the numbers in your summoning spell,
to read before bed, to remind you that
if the phone doesn't ring, it's me.