

COLLECTED POEMS

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Author's Note

Hello! I'm not much of a poet, but I dabble from time to time. It definitely helps me practice making my language more evocative in my fiction as well, and it's a great medium for venting feelings that are harder to express in prose. I hope this gives more insight into my abilities as a writer.

If you made it this far, thank you so much! Happy reading!

How to Simultaneously Lose and Gain Your Will to Live

Step 1: Put your headphones on and walk down the sidewalk in a jacket a little too light with your gaze angled just slightly downward and a semi-brisk pace

Step 2: Turn up the volume on Radiohead's "Let Down" and contemplate your inevitable death while avoiding eye contact with any person you pass by

Step 3: Look at the sky and think about how small you are in the grand scheme of the universe and wonder whether God exists and whether they love you and if you'll go somewhere after you die or if everything you are and have done is simply meaningless

Step 4: Admire the way the light filters golden through the clouds and breath out deeply through your mouth as if you're breathing out cigarette smoke even though you aren't quite self-destructive enough to turn to nicotine yet

Step 5: Think about your last dead-end talking stage and all the friendships you grew out of and how you're dad never really felt like a parent and debate whether this is all their fault or if there is actually some fundamental part of you that is and always will be inherently unlovable

Bonus: you walk to the grocery store and spend money you don't have to eat your feelings away on chocolate croissants just to feel bad about yourself after

Step 6: Walk back and curse yourself for being dramatic because you really don't deserve to be upset about all of this and you know you'd never actually want to die because you're deathly afraid of what comes after and so why are you even thinking about any of this if not to play the victim

Step 7: Race across the crosswalk in fear of getting run over and reiterate all the previous statements

Step 8: Look at the sky again and pretend you're in a coming-of-age movie and this will all pass and you'll turn into something worthwhile

Step 9: Imagine the future how you want it to unfold no matter how unrealistic and live in that fantasy for a moment because maybe you can manifest it or maybe there is a God listening and they'll give you what you want just this once

Step 10: Return home still listening to sad music and partially believing that you will never be loved the way you so deeply yearn to be but also the sky is so beautiful and life is a movie and the world is so vast that there must be something out there waiting to find you and one day you'll grow wings but not today and maybe there are people who love you after all and you're not dramatic you're just a teenage girl and life feels so stupid but you love it anyway and

Step 11: There's always hope

Step 12: Repeat

You're Free Now

You thought you were free—
from the rules, the stares, the 9:30 bedtime.
~~And you were, for a while~~
You *are*, for a while.

But it's more than you bargained for.
The freedom to wander, but no place to wander back to.
Your hometown isn't your hometown anymore,
and your new hometown isn't your *hometown*.

Home has always meant multiples,
but you always thought
at least that *one* will be constant.
The place where you rocked on the hammock,
before they cut all the trees down;
where you dodged the trashcans catching leaks from the
ceiling
on the way to your fifth period class;
where your dad took you to the pinball arcade
that he doesn't take you to anymore;
~~He doesn't take you anywhere anymore~~
where you went to the mall with your friends
that's now being gutted,
turned in houses for everything to grow, grow grow
and you're grow, grow, growing too.
But the place where you started,
cast your roots, sprouted and killed your first leaves,
is out of your reach.
You've been repotted, for better and for
worse.

But you wanted to be free, right?
From your family, but you still want them to love you.
And you think they do, really,
~~but some days it doesn't feel like it~~

And you wanted to be free,
but you wanted to be free to crawl back
for your friends and your pet hamster buried in the backyard,
for the tea shop you used to go to and the creek where you caught frogs

And you wanted to be free,
but everything and nothing is free.
So the world keeps shifting around you,

and there's nothing you can do about it.

Flowering Wings

Wings pull from my spine, my shoulder blades
tearing through the skin to brush the air.
And in place of blood,
flowers.

Spiderlily and lotus sprouting from my body
as if it were the springtime earth,
damp and soft,
a vessel for new things.

Petals intertwine with feathers—
Equally fragile, but not equally
of use.
For as my new wings beat against air,

the petals fall off like raindrops,
dropping out of my sight,
and the stems wither in their wake.
But not my wings.

My wings are firm,
rooted painfully to bone—
the wound where they sprouted still raw—
but I fly anyway.

And the movement stops
new flowers from blooming,
but I don't care
when I can taste the sky.

A thousand stars suspended, no,
flying, burning away all else
but halos of light.
And I am one of them.

Snapshots

<p>There's a moment when you're up in the sky, and you look outward and realize there's an ocean up there too.</p>	<p>It's a clear night in the winter: the air is sharp and the stars are hidden, but the streetlights are shining, pure and white as the snow on the ground, and the world is, for a brief moment, beautiful.</p>	<p>And the undersides of the clouds were completely gilded, as if God made a mistake, forgot he put the sun above them and not below.</p>
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Liminal Spaces

I

Cloaked in a haze of neon and the *clink* of pinballs, staticky music from an arcade game older than you are. You close your eyes and smell dust. Your father's voice blooms in your ears, clinging like vines, a quiet companion.

You wander, feet dragging on dirty, color-speckled carpet, fingers pressing buttons, flicking levers, nails tapping on glass. You have your favorites. Places you stop, pull back the launcher, revel in the *thwack* of the spring, and wait for the clattering.

You rejoice in the glowing red, numbers shooting up, in the worn divets of the machine, in the vines growing beside you, sprouting buds, so close to flowers. And then it's dark beyond the chilled glass, so you walk out, the vines wither, you don't turn back.

II

Crickets ring out a discordant symphony, voices fighting the summer cicadas. Hidden in tall, swaying grass that slices your young skin, a frog croaks out its presence, beckoning

the bright orange net you clutch in a mud-smearred hand. You slosh through murky creek water, almost losing a flip-flop to the current, mouth stained with blue raspberry

and pulled into a grin. A step and it startles. Leaping out as you lurch forward. You cradle the slimy creature in your net, and frog season is over.

III

Hollowed out, gutted, a pig carcass stripped of its organs, only dry ribcage and twisted spine, an empty skull that rings like a drum. Except this is not a skeleton. You walk across

beige linoleum, the tap of your
footsteps ringing. An echo, a drum.
The cavities you once loitered in, the
spaces between vertebrae, now dark
and shuttered, emptied and left

to rot. The gumball machines, the stale
candies you swallowed like poison and
pills, float like an island, the sternum.
There's no one here now, except for you.
The fly, buzzing for the last scraps of flesh.

IV

It's not yours anymore, but sometimes you consider
walking up and perching on the porch, like the fat
mourning doves that commanded your grandmother's
bird feeder, the ones your father called "derp birds",
and you consider waiting for someone to throw out seeds.

Maybe you can make your own seeds, let them fall from
your eyes onto the sidewalk you used to shovel in winter, into
the banks of oak moss that appear in fall. And when
the new people come out to shoo you off, they'll see your wet cheeks
and pity you, mourning what was once yours.

And maybe they'll let you float through one more time,
a ghost in a breathing body, over the spots where you know
the wood creaks. You'll lean against the granite island, facing
the kitchen window, now empty of the cardinals and toothpicks.
You'll watch for the mourning doves and wonder if they miss you.

After Dark

I walk a little faster after dark
past the shattered sheet of ice,
where the ground below caved in
 just the right way
that my friend and I could crash through the thin surface,
like jumping through a glass ceiling.
I keep my head on a swivel
to the road ahead, the grass to my side, then up to the stars.
And I see the Little Dipper winking back,
and tell myself that if I can see the stars,
 I'm safer.
Because less light pollution means less people,
but also no one to hear me scream.
I know how to kill a man with my bare fist;
how to break his nose
 just the right way.
I've never done it, but I like to tell myself that I could.
I could beat up the guys breaking my friends' hearts,
 I laugh.
I have to laugh because I probably can't.
If he's my size, maybe,
 but bigger?
A girl drives by singing as I flee from the dark,
blasting bad country music from a yellow car.
 I hate her.
Cause she circles around as if to brag,
"My parents can buy me a car and yours can't."
But I would put myself between her and a man,
 no hesitation.
If he knocked her down,
into the razor shards of an ice pit,
fingers squeezing the pale skin of her throat,
 I would fight him off.
I'd probably end up in the dirt beside her,
voice raspy and bruised,
but still, I'd try.
I'd do
 something.
And if someone just did something for me,
that's all I could ever ask for;
 but I know no one will,
 so I walk faster after dark.