

The Inevitable Inevitable

by

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This collection is dedicated to the four-year-old me who graduated preschool and told the class,

“I want to be king.”

We did it, babe. We are on top of the world.

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Abstract

In life, there are things that happen that we cannot stop. Some of these things are wonderful, such as realizing someone loves you, and others are terrible, like when that person leaves. The feelings we experience from these are, in a word, inevitable, and in an attempt to study what those feelings mean, this collection set out to identify and lie with the inevitabilities that surround life as I know it. It is written in three acts, like a film, and describes what I would like to think is the fated and inevitable life I was meant to receive. In a more serious style of poetry, this collection is not one that ignores the ugly, rather, it embraces everything dark and sticky and lets it have its moment. There is no bitterness here. This is always how it was supposed to be.

CONTENTS

Dedication	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
CONTENTS	iv
The Inevitable Inevitable	2
INTERIOR – BEDROOM – DAY	3
The Newest Constitution	4
The Woman in the Tree	5
The Arctic Ocean	6
Watching Love	7
It's Only Love	8
He Did Not Fall	9
Sitting Underwater Like Saoirse Ronan in Ladybird	10
September // October	11
She Needs This.	12
The Day Your Wish On the Star Will Be Fulfilled	15
It Was a Simple Goodbye	16
Paper Airplane	17
Just Another Poem	19
The Last Ones	20
Something About Space	23
Different Crickets	24
Until it No Longer Does	25
The Day the Flowers Ran Out of Water	26
After John Mayer's Slow Dancing in a Burning Room	27

A Forfeited Dance	29
March 23rd	30
To the Sound of Her Voice	31
Deadwood	32
Women and Men Should Support Women and Men and Fairytale Characters Too	33
Little Crab, Little Girl	34
four things I'll never forget and You'll never remember:	35
How to Take a Tequila Shot	36
Antifreeze	37
Playing with Fire	38
I Do Hope to be Back Soon	40
So She Became the Moon	42
My Friends, the Crickets	43
The Hardest Part	44
Wishing on the Moon	45
Leftovers	46
Royal Purple	47
the Girl Who Had to Grow Up	48
The Second Coming	49
Death and Taxes	50
The Woman on the Boat	51
An Introduction at Alcoholics Anonymous	52
The Only Advice	56
EXTERIOR – BUS STATION – AFTERNOON	57
The Inevitable Truth	58

Act I

The Inevitable Inevitable

It's a quicksand.

Pulling you faster the harder you thrash, exist in worry. Little Girl, you think you thrive in worry. You do not.

This is a trap you cannot escape. My love, the whole of it is the trap. You will be dragged under, and that is a fact, so leave that part be.

Instead, hum a song. Sing to the tune of the grit approaching your teeth. Make this time your own. If you let it, it will last just as long as it needs to.

And when it reaches your nose, and the dawn of the end reflects in your eyes, remember this, my love: There was never a person more fated than you to tell this tale: the letters, the tire tracks, the lights on the wall glowing neon pink. And not you nor it will ever be forgotten here.

INTERIOR – BEDROOM – DAY

The girl sits in her room and waits by the phone. She taps her pencil against her leg in nervous distraction. She clicks around on her laptop. Several tabs are open—guitar chord websites, her email, her calendar, a quiz for which color she is (it was blue).

The bedroom is half full of light, streaming in the window. It hits the right side of her face so one eye is illuminated to see it's not brown, but hazel and green.

There's a quiet breeze coming in through a vent. It matches her breathing. There's an inhaler sitting on her desk. The irony is not lost on her.

Outside, it starts to rain. This is the first thing to draw her attention away from anything immediately in front of her. She smiles at the rain. She follows its pointed direction toward a large suitcase on the ground. It is half empty.

GIRL (VOICEOVER)

Shit.

The Newest Constitution

Before I speak, allow me to make you a gift of a promise—

You are, before anything, a beating heart and a racing mind, and this is not different from those years old than you who demand the real and often cynical.

So, I will not lie to you.

But you must promise this back to me—that you will not hold my words against me. If I am to tell the truth, you must grant me this grace.

Little Girl, it is not easy to grow up. It is not easy to learn not to touch wet paint or wet cheeks that you feel your fingertips could heal. It's not easy to unlearn the melody to a song you know in choir when placed on the harmony or your own self-doubt. And it is not easy to fail, and you will fail, my love. This I am sorry to say, is my second promise.

My third is you need not let it take you. There's a magic you possess used to defy the weight it will plague you with. Remember that it can disappear but never go away. Color it red today so you can still recognize it pink tomorrow. Bask in it and love it with every tear in your tissue box. Promise me this, my love, and do so quickly. Promise me you will live in the world as long as you can.

The Woman in the Tree

The woman in the tree stands guard over the edge of the lawn. She protects the sidewalk—remembers a time before we were here, before those before us were here. The woman in the tree has legs longer in inches than years I am old. She haunts this hill with her grace, her beauty, her care. We named her Gaia.

Though Gaia is not human, we know she knows pain. She feels it. In the cold of bitter winter, she shivers, and her shoulders shake. She's watched it—seen it again and again when I run across the tree lawn, drunk at 2 am. She hurts with me when I water her roots with the tears formed by rum and heartbreak. She feels them splash silently across the dirt. I think she tries to suck it all away. I think she knows she cannot.

But on the nights that I dance across the living room floor, I keep the blinds open so she might see that part too—that the women of this Earth get their happy moments—that I'm thinking of her and her tree and her Earth and how when I dance, I'm one with it—belong to it. She moves with the wind to join me—gentle partner—loving mother—a beautiful woman in a beautiful tree.

The Arctic Ocean

Your mother is out at sea—
And you saw her yesterday
And you'll see her tomorrow
But for now, she's on a 5-day cruise.

And dad says please do not wake her
She's dreaming
Of a world where she believes
You love her

And your tongue is a water balloon
Filled with gasoline
Every word she spits is fire
A rubber membrane holding a time bomb

So don't speak for now
Because half of the world is already
Up in blaze and the polar bears don't
Need your pain too

And the polar bears tell you to escape
To get as far away from sea ice as you can
And taste somewhere there's air
That won't kill you both

And your mom is on a boat
Watching in ignorant bliss and
Dream state from the starboard deck.
She says she's whale watching.

Watching Love

A lot that I know about old love I learn from watching.
I watch my dad tease his mother about the man next door
and how because they're both old and lonely they could date.

She chuckles at the fun of it all, but she always tells him no.
As if he would ever be serious about setting up his mother—
As if she would take it as anything other than a joke—

But I think she feels like she has to say no every time for him.
Like how she went to the hospital everyday for him and
How she cleans off his grave every month for him.

I think if I were to fall in love that hard for that long,
I would have to be the one to go into the dark first.
I don't think I could even chuckle at the fun of it all.

I watched my grandmother at his funeral, and she didn't cry.
And I know that she cried long and hard about him.
I know I could never be that strong if that were me.

It's Only Love

The adults who have long ago left the playground will ask you what do you know of love, but Little Girl, what do you not know of love?

What do you not understand that you have not already found in the sandbox across from the dimples and overalls who tells you that you are funny—then drifts to the girl across on the monkey bars? When he leaves to play with her instead, you know the fondness, the heat in your cheeks, and you know the yearning.

And it really is that simple when it's all whittled down. They will tell you it's complicated, and God knows they love to make it complicated, but the heart only knows one level at which to love and it's fully.

This does not change. It never will.

He Did Not Fall

I choose to believe that Icarus was in love with the Sun.
I choose to think he climbed so high to kiss her, knowing it'd be his doom. One kiss.
To touch her golden lips would mean flying forever.
The wax may have been gone, but I choose to believe he was in control.
He did not fall into anything but love.
You see, when he dipped below the waves, he was caught by the tides and became the Moon.
Man-in-love became man-in-Moon to be only that much closer to her, his lover
Separated by fate and sky but reflecting light and all of her beauty,
And in the moments they eclipse he sees her again,
Bright and beautiful as she always was,
Always will be, they meet,
If only for a moment, a kiss, both hello and goodbye
No.
Not goodbye.
Until next time.
Until his waxing lips meet hers again.
He did not fall into the sea.
He did not fall into anything but love.

Sitting Underwater Like Saoirse Ronan in Ladybird

There's a scene in Ladybird where the title character sits at the bottom of a pool.
This is not an original shot.
It's in a lot of films, but this one hit me.
Maybe it's because part of me is convinced that Greta Gerwig read my diary to write that movie.
But I think it's because it looks like all I ever want to do these days.
When you're underwater, everything feels like it weighs less.
Like my shoulders are given a break from holding everything up on them—
Everything my heart is trying to carry.
The weightlessness without the letting go.

The summer after 2nd grade, I got an ear infection.
It got so bad it spread to the bone, aiming for my brain.
After surgery, they told me I would be okay,
But if I wanted to swim, I'd need an ear plug,
And that it might never fit right.
To this day, I cannot dive too deep without record scratch explosions and pain coursing through
my right ear.
I can never get to the bottom of the pool no matter how hard I try.

September // October

September was when it numbed
It was electric shocks to a corpse
It was a month early for Halloween
The sun retreated into the summer
Made a gift of drought for the moon
And she could no longer cry for me

I cannot say in any confidence
That I expected anything at all
But there was a brief moment
In late October that I thought
Maybe I was wrong to doubt
The thought was only a ghost

She Needs This.

Roses are red
 Violets are blue
 The number of cough drops I've ever bought from CVS
 Are one two three times less than the number of coughs I've ever had.

Or maybe more, but I was never good at math.
 I stopped learning it in 7th grade when Ms. Division
 Would cry every class about her divorce,
 And the squared-off complete-the-square distraction
 Pulled my attention toward the birds out the east window.

I started seeing a 'tutor' around that time, but
 She only ever wanted to talk about my *feelings*
 How I "attracted people who are bad for me"
 Through a hand puppet with my same brown hair
 And unbuttoned eyes with ~several~ eyelashes.

So, I hid behind a grandfather clock
 In her Tuscan inspired foyer
 And I forgot my self-
 Worth for so long I ended up in
 Your loose fruit-by-the-foot arms

And if I haven't said "fuck you" yet,
 That's my bad, and I'm sorry. So,
 Fuck you.
 Sincerely,
 Deep Within My Pencil

That's better.
 Now.
 Let's get this party started.

Wham
 Bam
 Fuck
 Shit
 Damn
 This poem is rated R for Wrong
 By the way,
 In how many ways can I tell you we were wrong?

Hey Mr. Nowhere Land,

Yesterday I finally did it! I jumped off that little staircase
 Into the parking garage like we always said we would.
 Except you weren't there to see it, but I still limped away.

And blonde hair looked/smelled/felt like piss to me
 Ever since the crows on your street installed it
 As indoor plumbing and told me about the remodel.

I haven't been able to listen to the sound of birds at 5am
 Since the first/second/last day you and I stayed up long enough
 To promise one another the sunrise every morning onwards.

The one time we woke up and you kissed me the morning after
 I suppose I misinterpreted the ghost of your lust for a moment
 That was meant to tell me we were making progress.

But progress isn't judged by the number of lines in a poem
 Or the number of poems that are written about you
 And yet I keep writing them and it makes me sick.

Last year I had acid reflux for three weeks,
 I made everyone think your emotional impact
 Was apple cider vinegar and insulin shots.

Sometimes I smell you in the middle of my day like a bloodhound
 Sniffing for a limping fox in a forest and sometimes I pretend
 That I'm the bloodhound and not the fox, hungry for a last meal.

That made me cough up breakfast, lunch, and dinner.
 And I only had honeydew, tofu, and 5 alarm chili (respectively)
 (one alarm per red flag you waved under my nose).

Ooo chili...
 Just like mama used to make...
 Cook off ground beef and garlic and add the tomato sauce,
 Oregano, my right shoe, black beans, cumin,
 A hearty slap in the face, chili powder (duh),
 Salt, pepper, heartbreak,
 The silent treatment,
 Unearned guilt,
 And cayenne to taste.

She'd take out the cumin, though.
 I'm allergic.

My eyes swell up, and all I can see is every mistake I've ever made.
And they're numbered one through one hundred and forty-three
Where the first eight are all you.

The Day Your Wish On the Star Will Be Fulfilled

There will come a day where the job of picking daisies to adorn your head will be taken by a boy who can't stop looking into your eyes.

Little girl, you will be afraid to look back, but I beg you to look back. Those eyes are going to be home for a very long time.

Those eyes are going to tell you the truth when they say your hair is like a waterfall and your lips are a treasure. They'll take you asteroid jumping across space and land back on Earth on a mountain of sand. They'll introduce you to his mother and his brother, and they will tell you how amazing it sounds when you hug him – like anything broken in him was rearranged like stars.

And this is okay. It is okay to love the boy at the end of it all. And it is okay to flounder in the meantime, but you need not wait for him, because before him, the love you give yourself must be enough.

And when he does come knocking at your heart—

He will love you so hard, my love. Love him back, and do not stop. No matter what. Do not stop.

It Was a Simple Goodbye

It was a simple goodbye, like leaving a house party early¹.
 I told the boy in the black car I love him,
 and the boy in the black car drove away².
 I did not see him again, not ever in the same way.
 Sometimes I think about his warmth³,
 The tightness of his sweatshirt on my neck⁴,
 The radiating heat off his body at night. Sweet slumber⁵.
 I remember the eyes⁶ he had the first time he told me he loved me⁷.
 The eyes he had our final goodbye were different. More haunted⁸.
 I think about them every day. How I might have saved them.
 And the words told to me in a dark room, how they felt like home.
 How in the moment I couldn't say it back,
 because everything good is always taken away
 when it's given with such love.
 He said he loved me⁹.
 He said it first¹⁰.

¹ It happened quickly and without the emotions of a night of heavy drinking behind us.

² It took maybe five minutes in total for him to paint over a year and a half of love. And it *was* love.

³ And the thoughts of his slow and measured voice leave me thinking this was an easy box to check off on his to do list for the day.

⁴ But it was just yesterday he hugged me the same way his clothes would cling to my frame.

⁵ Sometimes he would wake up in a panic thinking I had left him in between once upon a time and the narratives of his darkened nightmares.

⁶ His cool blue eyes always held the hope of a tomorrow. And he would be the boat along the cool blue waves and I would be the paraglider in the cool blue sky.

⁷ When he told me he loved me he kissed this hope into my own lips with all the excitement and anticipation of a child on Christmas morning, and I only cried.

⁸ The cool blue was replaced by that black, and the dawn of my everything had quickly collapsed to thick blinding tar.

⁹ He *said* he *loved* me.

¹⁰ I said it last.

Paper Airplane

You told me you don't love me, that you never did.
The words hung on the ceiling fan spinning too fast
Until I turned into the loose air that it blew around—
Then a paper airplane kamikaze flying low

I flew out the open window and fell 3 stories
Became newspapers scattered in the street
Blended in with the cold monotone pavement
Decomposed and faded into the soft earth

I felt the weight of footsteps I let walk all over me
Felt the weight of the rainclouds returning to my head
The weight of my heart forgetting how to beat

I stopped feeling all together

Act II

Just Another Poem

It's nothing you haven't heard before:
A list of words strung together.
It's arbitrary artistic expression.

It doesn't mean anything to you,
But I just want you to know:
It means everything to me.

The Last Ones

I sat in an empty parking lot talking to a friend at 2:21 am
Watching deer listen to the sound of our shared tears hit blades of grass
And he told me that this would always be our fate.

What? Coming here to scream when nothing else makes sense?
No, he said, being the last one in the house as the fire consumes the floorboards,
Scrambling for the fire extinguisher we thought we kept under the sink

The last one riding the bus as it reaches the end of the line the
Last one holding onto the kite before the wind takes it the last
One to say 'I love you' and mean it.

We are the last ones, he said. You, me, and all of those stars.
We sat alone in the dark, and no one came for us.
And we wondered how many we were.

It's a Heavy Flying

I was a loose tooth in the mouth of a child.
 I was cotton candy all color and melting.
 I was the hint of good intentions in his smile
 That shone so bright it faded into my skin.
 I was a mirage.
 I was the dish soap bubbles
 That landed on his nose and promised him clean.
 I was glass—
 Easily breakable and then
 The main component to chandeliers.

I was fantastic.

And he looked so right.

He was the buyer,
 The price-to-be-paid-er,
 He wrapped me in paper
 And carried me home.
 I remember.
 Once upon a Bitter September
 Called my leather
 Soft and mimicked it in his eyes
 (That disguise I despise, I despise).

He held me with only his fingertips.
 And it didn't feel good,
 But it felt.

Like the knock on the wooden door
 The knuckles and fingers—all white and forgiveness
 Grabbed the remote and turned his voice mute.

Volume down
 He let go.

Only—
 I didn't fall.
 I ascended.

Up, up into the heavens, all thick and velvet—
 I grew into clouds, moon, and sky.

I possessed any number of stars, but not his.
I tumbled hard and rough and never soft again.
I accumulated cumulonimbus.
I rained.
I cracked thunder skulls over my knees.
I threw up lightning.
I broke.

And then when I needed someone
A body to identify the constellations
Call me back out one by one by name
I washed my ocean wings around his ear
And I asked why he didn't stay.
(A mistake)

And he heard me—
But he refused to listen.

Something About Space

I heard you left the city
Packed up your bags and left for a while
I myself haven't left my house in a month
To leave you space to breathe
But you're gone now.

I went outside yesterday.
I went for a walk yesterday.
I thought of how right now,
This whole city is mine
To explore without fear
Of stepping on you
Like cracks in the sidewalk.

The night is quiet, too quiet.
And it tastes wrong.
I went outside to find the space to breathe
And found myself more trapped than before.
It's too small out here—
Too empty without you here.

But my wish that you'd return
Is overshadowed
By my fear that you'd return.
This city is a place
You and I cannot escape
Whether in it or away from it.
How terrifying.

Different Crickets

Night skies and crickets and breathing in nothing.
There's nothing for me to inhale that would satisfy me.
As much as I love this place, I think I need to leave.

I think any place in which I've looked for home
Has failed because I'm looking in the wrong places
As if I am simply looking at the wrong crickets

But the night sky whispers me secrets of other places
That it has seen in its rounds like it knows my yearning
Embraces my heartbreak like a blanket.

They never stop moving, but they've rubbernecked
Watching my body walk across this city in tears
As they trace their way somewhere else.

I miss them. But more than that, I envy them.
Wish to be them. To be in a different sky
Over a different city with different crickets

Where nobody knows my name or has broken my heart.

Until it No Longer Does

Little Girl, it is not your fault. And you won't believe me, this I know, so take it from him, my love.

When the boy tells you he must go, you cannot keep him. And the weight of your heart will not be enough to pay his ransom no matter how hard you try.

Little Girl, I promised to tell you only the truth, and the truth is, he must go. and you must go. And while you'll force forgetfulness to protect yourself from his computer password or his mother's maiden name, you'll still carry what he told you in the parking lot of the grocery store last fall and the temperature of his breath as he laid beside you.

My love, he cannot take these things back. Whether you call it guilt or red hot branding, it will hide in your mind until it no longer does. And I think you know that.

The terrifying truth of the lack of control is not its strength but its breadth. I only hope to hold you myself until it no longer does.

The Day the Flowers Ran Out of Water

The day the flowers ran out of water, I was sitting in my lawn watching dogs of different sizes walk by and I thought about how we are so small but ants are even smaller, and how ants can carry 50 times their body weight. How I can do that too with all the shit on my shoulders.

The day the flowers ran out of water, I took a shower and washed every part of my body down to underneath each fingernail. How I stepped out onto the bathroom rug all sore and bloodied but scrubbed so clean.

The day the flowers ran out of water, I realized they had been dying for a while, but only then did I recognize the sulking downturned faces of the roses and the browned edges of each leaf.

And I thought to myself, 'what a terribly beautiful metaphor'.

When you gave me the flowers, I drew them a bath in a crystal vase and cut the stems all angled and perfect. I arranged them gently, and I placed them proudly next to the window for all to see.

After some time, I cut one and pressed it between the pages of my bible, accidentally making the book of revelations all browned and sticky. I did it to keep you forever in those tiny pretty petals. I did it for you.

The day the flowers ran out of water, I tried to cry them more to drink, but my salt could not quench their thirst.

They crumbled mercilessly in my hands and left me wondering why you ever bought me something you knew would one day die.

After John Mayer's Slow Dancing in a Burning Room

Hand on hip swaying to the beat
Of the rum in our throats swimming
In our heads and humming memories
Over the sounds of a box fan.

It's a dance on a minefield.
A waltz through this fire.
Too warm to be cooled
By the silly fan in the corner.

You grab my hand and stitch it
To yours like you're saying
That you love me, but no
Words exchange.

This is a dance, not a conversation.
It's not a promise I'm looking for,
But the part of me that knows that
Is six feet under the rum and stomach acid

The dance is a stumble.
It's as much beautiful
As it is mistake—
Too soon too soon.

We drift to the dance floor—
Not ready, not set.
You dip me down and let go,
And I fall through the floor

Kissing hollow wood,
Precious empty sentiments
I ask you why you ever quit,
And you tell me you hate yourself.

Imagine a dancer so lovely,
So loving, hating his own feet.
I'd like so much that you'd see me
On the dance floor again.

Step around the box fan.
Slip ice cubes from

Your lips into mine.
We're cool.

Let's try something
Just as casual, my lead.
Something like swing.
Somewhere like home.

A Forfeited Dance

The morning light shines through the window
And tickles your nose sleeping into the day.

Summer has walked in the door and hung her hat on the wall
So as Spring fades, puts on her coat, and laces her shoes,

They both kiss my cheek—one hello and one goodbye and
Pass me between them, dancing over the morning dew.

They compliment my eyelashes and romanticize my one dimple,
But I am only looking at you—the rise and fall of your chest.

They know they're losing me, but they do not cry,
Rather bow and hold out their hands to guide me,

And I step down from the clouds to return to you in bed.
Humming to the beat of your breathing.

You were always the most beautiful this way.

March 23rd

There's a tree on the hill
and it stands alone
but never feels so

Like an old man with sand in his boots
reading a newspaper on the porch he
reads me as I go to visit him like I
said I would every 23rd of the month

He greets me with silence
and I read to him about fallen branches
and salt and pepper skies

I never leave out anything regarding
middle names or favorite colors
or if the memories I write
on the backs of my hands have dimples

He will forget every detail
in time
I will not

To the Sound of Her Voice

The old woman cannot always remember my name,
but she sings the same song in church every Sunday.
The old woman would cry if we ripped out her carpeting,
and she still cries for the basement she lost years ago,
but if I asked her about the man her daughter remembers
coming into the living room in the dark, she could not.

I wonder if the old woman would tell me about her past,
if she ever thought to leave the old man alone one night.
I wonder if the old man ever knew about the other, and I wonder
if he forgives her and if he wonders if the sound of his voice
is enough to keep coming through the front door every day.
I wonder if he died tomorrow if she'd have any regrets.

But most of all I wonder if the sound of my voice is his.
If somehow she passed on the gift of receiving forgiveness.
The first thing I want to say to the man I am to marry is
I love you, but the second is I'm sorry. I do not know for what.
But I hope the sound of my voice will be enough to keep him
coming through the front door every day for the rest of my life.

Deadwood

This is deer in headlights. This is how it feels
to be alone in a street at midnight wondering
if the car on the street will drive away from you
or away with you in it and if you'll make a sound.

This is standing in front of glowing white eyes
that borrow your worst fears to hold for a while
until the nightmare nightlights flash and drive
down another equally dark road.

I have often contemplated myself as fight or
flight or freeze, and that day I flew
all the way to your arms, and you held me
long enough to make the pain stay.

You held me long enough to remind me
that I missed every moment that would forever
belong to the Earth in compost and death.
And I left crying that it happened and was over.

We ended up on either side of the city
knowing deadwood doesn't grow after it falls.

Women and Men Should Support Women and Men and Fairytale Characters Too

If you asked me to guess the number of fish in the sea,
I would say no.
Or I would say too many.
Or not enough.

Maybe Goldilocks was onto something when
She refused imperfection
Maybe she deserved a little more than too soft and a
Little less than too hard

And maybe when she just asked for standards
For just right
We were in the wrong when
We titled her villain and said take what you can get.

And told her to smile cuz
She looks a lot prettier when she smiles—
Maybe
We were wrong.

Or maybe this whole time she's hidden her teeth
Because she's the wolf
That Little Red still has nightmares about
Lurking in her grandmother's generation's closet

Maybe telling Rapunzel to let her hair down
And stop being such a prude is
Because we want to see her
Prideful shameful conservative slut side come out

And maybe that's why we keep fixating
On Cinderella's feet

The Little Mermaid swam, walked, and died
Turned into seafoam
So that someone could think her beautiful.
Call her "princess"
Consider her human.
But we turned around and told her,
"Honey, there are plenty of fish in the sea.
Why try that hard for the one?"

Little Crab, Little Girl

The first thing you must know is this was never what I wanted for you, but you were built to endure this.

Little Girl, your heart, I am sorry to say, was made to break. One of the inevitabilities of growth is a kind of growing pain, and for your love to grow too big for the walls of your heart to hold it needs to break. Be broken away from.

My love, you are a hermit crab that deserves the most perfect shell. And you cannot allow the doubt you feel to hold you under. As many times as you dive into it, you must also come up for your air.

This is the only thing I must make you do.

The rest of this time can be spent in tears and tissues and blankets and shedding the weight and the thoughts and the words you cannot stop creating that he needs to know.

Little Girl, you can do all of these things, but you must remember yourself. When you were made, the first thing you were given was your strength. And I wish the weight of the entire ocean wasn't draped over your back, but this time, you have the ability to get through it. You are so much greater than you know.

four things I'll never forget and You'll never remember:

1. You learned Patience so fast,
it rendered me blind for an entire year.
I sat on a chair in the corner
of the room and in my mind,
and I listened to the soft rain of fingers on piano keys
until every memory
went to the black and white.

2. alone in a parking garage
I leaned over the wall
you leaned against it
My eyes on the sky
yours on the floor
nothing was ever the same.

3. the first time
you kissed me

4. the last time
I kissed you

How to Take a Tequila Shot

First, remind yourself you don't have to do this.
 There is nothing worse than putting yourself through pain you don't deserve,
 But maybe that's the point.
 If you're already sweating, you're doing it right
 You can taste it.

Next, lick your hand and promise to return its sodium soliloquy.
 Remember the last promise?
 The one that kissed your lips and played in your mouth?
 Hung onto the back of your teeth like monkey bars
 Convinced you the taste was sweet,
 But it's as salty as you are now.
 The Morton girl's tears onto your hand,
 Your last seconds to escape tick by

With the sound of the clock in his room,
 And before you can remember another detail
 Of his golden spun sheets and words,
 Put the shot glass up to your lips,
 The same lips,
 And they burn the same they did.

Funny how life's lemons are the thing to ease you
 Or lime. We don't judge here.
 Find release in the sour citrus saliva,
 Coating your tongue.
 Coaxing your hand.
 Counting your luck

As you reach back for another.
 And the color of his eyes
 Fades even farther from
 Your memory, at least
 For the night you can
 forget

the feeling of his fingertips.
 And you promised
 yourself you wouldn't,
 But what's the harm
 in one more?

Antifreeze

When I say the memories of you are dangerous
I mean I once drank a swig of antifreeze thinking it was blue Gatorade
And in getting my stomach pumped I was less afraid than I am now.

It's walking down the street in all the confidence of being over you
Then remember how your entire family facetimed me to sing on my birthday
And how that won't happen this year. (it didn't).

I wouldn't think that something like that would affect me so sharply
But every time I think, my stomach pumps itself
And all I know is your mom told me she wants to keep in touch.

All I know is your therapist thinks I wouldn't make a very good friend
And the last time I played mini golf I was aiming for your foot and
When your face appears on someone else's snapchat story I throw up.

It had been a hot day—all sweat and gasping breath from running
This was before the doctor realizes I had asthma, and all I knew was that
The bottle in the garage was identical to glacier freeze Gatorade.

And in the pictures I kept, your eyes were the same.

Playing with Fire

Two months ago, the house I called a home burned down.
They said the flame originated in the living room,
That it was a stray spark from the fireplace which

Kissed the carpet, and their love spread to the curtains,
Onto the tiny couch where we had once sat, and then
Scarred the windows we had always kept shut.

The fire started in the place where fires should be,
Where it was supposed to be safe, the fireplace, the
Place for fire, the place where it belonged,

But it didn't belong along the walls of my memory.
When the smoke began to paint the ceiling black,
I was sleeping in the upstairs bedroom.

I only remember waking up to heat on my lips,
And then my vision became red as I sunk my
Bare feet onto burning carpet coals. I ran.

My palms turned scarlet from the metal of the
Doors I had to open, lacing my fingertips around
Boiling tea kettle handles I was brave enough to touch.

I fell to my knees and crawled on scabbing elbows.
Paper memories along the walls singed up before
My eyes closed to let my sight live to see another day.

When I got outside, my world was reducing to ash.
I stood helpless in the cold while the flames burned hot.
I went numb witnessing destruction of all I'd ever known.

Eventually, my lungs cleared from the smoke that had
Filled them up like black and gray helium balloons.
I escaped with a physical reminder not to play with fire.

Later, in the rubble, I found remains of your t-shirt.
I sat in my late living room and I cried enough tears
To have been able to put it out before it even began,

When burns were so small they only needed band aids,
When stray sparks meeting carpets were treasured,

When your blazing heat around me meant goodnight,

When the loveseat didn't feel so lonely by myself,
When windows weren't locking me into a memory,
When the fire was still in the fireplace where it belonged.

Once, I was asked if my house was burning down,
What would be the one thing I would rush to save,
But I couldn't find you among the blaze.

I Do Hope to be Back Soon

It's quite expensive
All the debt I've racked up
In time spent thinking about you.

Put it on my tab
We both know its irony.
I'll never be able to pay it off.

So I've decided to leave town
Keep my head low
Evade the tax collector.

Act III

So She Became the Moon

She cried herself the ocean
Boarded a midnight boat and sailed it
Until she knew every current by name.
Ebb and Flow bowed to waning tongue.
They swore to never again kiss the sand
Without her Cupid's bow blessing.
And the day Atlantis fell to the depths
Was only because she willed it so.

My Friends, the Crickets

At night I whisper your name
But all I ever hear are crickets

So I started calling to them
I started calling each by name

It began as a mutual respect
And it evolved into friendship

They danced around my bed frame
Begged me to surrender

To their sweet song of silence
And silence's sweet song

Until I slept through the sunshine
Swept daytime under the rug

Swept your name out the window
Down the hill to the street

They told me it got hit by a car
I told them I didn't care anymore

I told them I like it that way.

The Hardest Part

Little Girl, this is the hardest part because this is the part they all have opinions on. Because of this, I cannot tell you much. This is the bit only you can decide.

When your best friend says to leave him in the past. And your mother says to give him the time. Or the targeted videos on your phone tell you he misses you because it listens to you more than you think God does. You must take it all with the grains of salt spilling from your tear ducts with every trace of him you dig up from your closet.

You get to decide your own strength here. And whether that comes by holding out for him at the risk of the rejection crushing your heart a second time or breaking away from his hold at the risk of losing something you want to fight for, you will be stronger after it.

But give yourself days of rest. My love, your legs must heal in between workouts. Only your core can be exercised every day. Your core where you keep who you are. Who you always have been.

Flex that part of you now. Write it into poetry to your younger self. Tell her, “Little Girl, this is the hardest part”.

Wishing on the Moon

I just want you to know
I will always wish you the best
Sometimes that's how life goes
And you were the one that got away

You were a time that got away
And if I close my eyes and think
I can remember the nights
And I can remember the sky

Whenever I look at the stars
I'm transported to a time
That wishing on each one
Did not matter to me

They will always be the same stars
But they live within an old time
And this year is different because
This year I'll sleep through the night

When the dusk pulls my hair
And evening air taps my shoulder
I'll only have eyes for the moon
She deserves to be wished on now

Leftovers

There is leftover chicken in my fridge from dinner, and there are leftover memories of you in a box under my bed. I think they are the same.

Returning to them is not the same as the first time—something becomes bitter. or sour. or wrong.

The key I had made for you, printed in purple. The plane ticket from when we spent a week in the Caribbean ocean, holding our liquor and laughing like idiots. There's a spot for the reel of film I made to tell you 'yes, I will love you'. You never gave it back.

Something about the way I try to warm up the chicken in my microwave feels as fake as pretending I'm keeping these pictures for any other reason than longing.

Longing for the taste of thyme we put in to make it taste so beautiful. A flavor I'll not mistake or reproduce on my tongue in the same way again. The way you taught me to cut an onion, and the way I never forgave you for it.

The way we perfected every recipe. The way I'll eventually forget it all—cold and deteriorating in the back shelves. Under my very head as I rest. How by the time I'll remember, the mold will have settled. Beyond saving. Ending up in the trash.

Royal Purple

I don't know why the color of hope changes every time I'm with someone new.
The color of eyes and the sky when the sun peaks over the horizon,
Wondering if it will rise or fall.
Sometimes it's the color of the girl forgotten in Sedona, Arizona.

It was royal purple this last time.
It was a color I could never find anywhere other than a computer screen.
And I look around my bedroom and realize I don't have a single thing in that color.
I don't know what that means.

the Girl Who Had to Grow Up

It's 3:37 am a year and a half later, and I still have your shadow in my nightstand drawer. It's dark outside, and just the glow of my phone gives me sun burns like it's asking me to cover up the parts of myself you made familiar to the night. I only think in memories now, played on a toy piano. The day I found out about her, I flew away and left my ballet slippers in your dresser drawer. I never had a chance to remain graceful. You took my balance and put it in a mason jar on a shelf I couldn't reach without your help unless I stood on the ladder you purposefully broke the day you first tasted the backside of my teeth.

And now, when he asks me why I don't like it when he runs his fingers over my stretch marks in the dark, I tell him I'm ticklish even though I haven't found hands touching my body funny in years, and yours will not be the main character of my story. I will not be the girl whose biggest thing that ever happened to her was you. Every young woman must eventually move out of the nursery. It is the burden of so many girls to have to keep a shadow of a boy with them for however long. Maybe forever. My body is no longer afraid of the lack of light, but it hasn't forgotten your smell or the way it ached the night you started to kiss her instead.

Goodnight to the ballet slippers. Goodbye to the mason jar. I only want to keep the part of you that breaks apart in the daylight.

The Second Coming

The day I finally realized the savoir I needed was myself
Was the same day I fell to my knees in front of my mirror,
Rediscovered the color of my eyes –the color of myself,
And I noticed my lips were chapped from holding back for too long.

That day I made rosary beads out of my rotting memories.
Wearing them on my neck, I baptized my mind in holy water.
I made myself pure, devouring loaves of body—self-love,
Drinking gallons of blood and confidence-spiked independence.

That day I realized I had fasted from my tears for too long.
I cried for the first time in 40 days and 40 nights,
And I found out you can't wake up on the right side of the bed
When you've had the mattress pushed up against the wall.

That day I realized the poisoned thorns were inside of me.
I ripped open my own chest to retrieve your broken rib promises.
I looked you in the eyes as I gave them all back because
I was sick from carrying around a part of you wherever I went.

That day I crucified my past self, she died, and I buried her.
On the third day I rose again, new and adorned with scars,
One on my heart, one on my palm, one behind my ear.
Father, I found Heaven. This is unconditional love.

Death and Taxes

They say the only things that are certain in this world are death and taxes.
And the art of tax evasion is the exception that makes the rule
Maybe giving people hope that they will be able to avoid death too.
Perhaps you can.

Maybe we build our legacies with such care so our names forget to fade.
There is the couple dug up from Pompeii who died in sweet embrace,
And we may not know their names but we know their love. Their legacy.
Maybe that is eternity.

Maybe growing up is finding our person in the soot as the volcano erupts
And maybe growing old is holding onto them as Mother Nature reclaims you.
Perhaps forever is in the moments after your eyes close for the last time.
As if death is the tax for life.

The Woman on the Boat

The woman on the boat is said to know almost nothing but the smell of salt and the taste of the horizon. She does not know where she's going, nor does she care where she's been, but she can feel by the wind across her goosebump-laden skin that she's soon to approach new lands.

The woman on the boat battles sea monsters on the daily. She keeps a sword and a smile in her pocket at all times, and each time she wins, with her final blow, she kisses their foreheads—descending back into the dark depths.

She tells them, "I love you though you fight me" through chapped lips and damp brow. I promised her I'd learn to write 'love' the way she spells it out loud, but she tells me it's not something meant to be written down.

The woman on the boat knows no pen or paper, only compass needles and clear thread of open ocean woven between her teeth. I have only ever known her by the way her voice echoes off stationary harbors. She sails onwards.

When our paths finally cross, and I meet her—all crow's feet and crow's nest, I will be kind and gentle and strong and free all at once. I will not be dragging the ankle chains of doubt or the men who told me I can't. I eagerly await that day to come.

An Introduction at Alcoholics Anonymous

Hello everyone.

I'm here.

And I'm here today because I've been told

That admitting you have a problem is the first step to recovery

And I am addicted to falling in love.

Which I know isn't the same thing as alcoholism

But there's something about finding yourself frozen in another person's eyes

That looks so much like the bottom of a bottle of whiskey,

So I think this is a good place to start.

And I began with those easy kinds of things.

When Brendan H leant me his teddy bear in preschool

The day I had to leave early for a doctor's appointment

And was too afraid to go alone.

And in second grade it was the way Ethan S ignored

The curse of cooties and played Pokémon with me anyway

Then in third when Ryan N only invited two people to his birthday party

And I was one of them

I micro-dosed on smiles and little favors

My tolerance built up higher than my expectations

So when I was in seventh grade and Larry Z held my hand

On the way to our science competition

And played Stereo Hearts for me on the hotel piano

I knew I was getting something harder

Because him breaking up with me the next year was the first time

Certain parts of my heart were given permission to feel.

And the rush was insane

And the letter he wrote to give me my first taste of heartbreak was insane

And the way I cried into the shoulder of my best friend was insane

And I

Was in so much emotional pain

And suddenly love became the hangover that made none of it worth it

So three years later when seven different guys expressed interest within two months

I cried for the following three

Until one asked me to prom with a gas station slurpee

And spent the next year and a half fighting

The stereotype that most stoners can't put out

And my hormonally deficient brain tripped so hard
 I couldn't walk the same ever again
 And when he broke up with me over a phone call
 Because we had both left for college and the distance was too much
 For him
 My ears rang so loudly
 That my middle school ghost rose from the grave
 To answer it herself
 To remind me that men still ain't shit
 But did I listen?

The short answer is no.

The long answer is a few weeks later
 I was in what most people call a 'friends with benefits rebound situation'
 In which in the process of shutting down and restarting
 Lucky bachelor number 6 stole my memory
 And hid behind two doors and stairwell
 To show me how not on the same level we were.
 And I kept falling and falling
 For his smile and soft words that melted onto my skin—
 Until he returned after summer vacation with blonde hairs in his teeth
 And a solo cup full of excuses that smelled like whiskey
 And all I could think about was where I had been that summer—
 Having met John Doe at camp
 Who made me laugh with the most genuine parts of my core—
 That I could've let mean something but didn't—
 To hold out for someone whose only soft quality was his morals.

So I became hard
 And cold
 And tightly rolled up like a relay baton
 Handed from runner to runner
 Even though none of them intended to finish the race.

So I'll be honest
 When Seven asked for my number
 The first day he met me
 And then what I thought about 'the whole dating thing' five days later
 I took him for a joke.

But my addiction to feeling something beat out my fear
 Of inevitability once again
 And so every time
 He tells me
 He loves me

He leaves me
 Wondering if
 He'll leave me
 And if that's the last time
 I'll hear it through his lips.
 As if saying it back isn't hard enough.

I keep having to learn there's a difference between
 Happiness and distraction from loneliness
 But I think I'm more afraid of the former
 Because I'm not addicted to being in love.
 I'm addicted to falling in it.

It's the rollercoaster rush of going down that first big hill
 Because none of the rest of the ride can ever compare
 When you know there's an end of the line
 The inevitable inevitable
 Where the seat belt comes off—
 The next person gets into your seat—
 Rides on.

And I'm here today saying this
 But make no mistake
 This is not a love poem.
 It's an admission of guilt.
 A declaration of defeat.

Everything inside of me tells me to run far away
 Even when everyone in front of me tells me to stay
 That I might have something good here.
 Someone good here.
 But if my past is any indicator
 I've got little time before 'he' changes his mind

So even with his hand so steadily in mine
 Every time I see a soft boy with soft eyes at the party
 Kissing the girl with a bright smile
 I imagine I'm her
 I imagine I'm living in his heart forever
 Or in the boy who smiled at me in film class
 Or in the boy I met on that camping trip
 Because waiting for your roof to cave in during a rainstorm
 Is easier when you've got your eyes on an umbrella

And 4 months ago when it rained it poured
 So hard that my socks are still sopping wet from the tears

That haven't stopped a day since
Because I'm young and make mistakes but
I was convinced that this one was my styrofoam cup
Around for 50 years before it would dissolve into the ground—
An Earth my roots have never known permission to grow too far into.
Maybe that started with Brendan or Larry,
Or maybe it began when my grandfather hit me for the first time.

But I'm not a lover
Or a fighter
Or even a writer.
I'm an addict.
And I need help.

The Only Advice

We are not so old yet, Little Girl, but we are getting there. I cannot promise you ease, but I can promise you resilience. I can promise you thick skin and calluses from old love and guitar strings and facial lines from smiling too big every day after you found your best friend and a space without hair in your eyebrows that won't grow back from before you learned how to use wax strips and tweezers correctly and the sparkle in your eyes that moved to your lips the first time a boy told you he loved you. Little Girl, you're about to enter both heaven and hellfire where all that will happen was meant to happen, and it won't always be fun.

And you'll cry at night asking why the diagnosis and why you failed that math test and why he left you, and when you don't get the answer from God the first time you call on him, you'll ring me up instead, but I must admit that I'm still on hold with Him myself, because sometimes the answer isn't in an answer but in the time between where you were and where you are.

My love, one thing we will never know for certain is why the inevitabilities are inevitable, but after the sand and the stars fade to nothing and the tears become glass skyrocketing around an empty Earth in a worthless orbit, you'll find a power in your core to believe that you're allowed to happen to things as much as they happen to you.

You will learn that you only have to do each day once, but you also only get to do each day once. And I must tell you, my love, Little Girl, myself both 15 years ago and 15 days ago, we are here, and we are older, and we are better for every lipstick stain and used tissue and empty coffee mug.

Hear me now, we are okay.

EXTERIOR – BUS STATION – AFTERNOON

The girl sits on a bench and waits for the bus in the rain. In her palms she holds all the sweat in her body, but the hope she held has since slipped away. There's a notebook in her lap. "Film Class Notes".

The girl sits on a bench and waits for the opportunity to start over. Leaning against her leg is a large suitcase full of her life—the blanket her mom bought her. the lucky stone she found at recess in first grade. a t-shirt with his smell on it.

The girl looks at the bus schedule on the wall. It's lit up with green letters telling her she will be leaving in 10 minutes. She looks to the door and her knee bounces. She waits for someone.

The girl opens her notebook and writes a poem. It takes her 5 minutes. She writes, "There's nothing for me here anymore". She erases the poem. Tears well in her eyes.

[And this is the part where the boy is supposed to come running in from the street and tell her he was wrong. and tell her he is sorry. and tell her he loves her. He does not take his cue.]

The bus driver calls for the last boarders.

The girl wipes the tears from her eyes, and they blend into the sweat on her palms.

The bus is here, and the street is empty.

The girl is frozen in time. loading the luggage into the undercarriage. finding a seat in the back corner. looking out the window as the rain drops drip down the glass to mirror her emotions. weather motif. very on the nose.

GIRL (VOICEOVER)

Maybe this isn't the movies. And I'm going to have to move on from this place.
No matter how much I want to stay.

The Inevitable Truth

The truth is, we don't know what comes next. We believe that the stars will call us back home and sleep will cradle our bones. It's a homecoming and a freeing into the sweet unknown—falling, flying, resting.

The truth is, Little Girl, we know no truth. In the end, we define our own inevitable