

My Own Private River

You were always too early and I was always too late.
You died when I was ten, but stayed with me. Housed
beneath the TV. Living on as a VHS. Red-lettered and
red-eyed. Cigarette hanging from your *David* lips.
“Don’t tell me, but is it a curse?” I wonder sometimes.
Houses falling from the sky. Houses like barns. Houses like mine.
Salmon swimming upstream, and love before it was theory.
“You don’t pay me, but I love you.” But all love is paid for.
I realize that now. And look, we both have PTSD. From *It*.
From love. How obvious. How silly. But you were always
more. More beautiful than me. And I know, I know. I know
I only love you because I can’t have you. Because I can’t
buy you -- the way that men think they can buy anything.
But you died at twenty-three and you died at twenty-two,
and I died too, I think. Or, was that just a dream? And now?
Now I’m waiting and waiting. Waiting for you to show up
too late again. Like you did back in high school. When I told you
I’d be back, didn’t I? I promised you. I took my fingertips and
plucked a key hiding in your hair and warmed it inside of my
palms. Stretched it out from ear-to-ear until it was just a thread
and handed you back the spool and said, “Wait. Just wait
for me.” I’m no movie heroine. All those times. All those times
that you overlooked me. Am I really supposed to just let all that
go so easily? I’ve been swallowing your neglect the same I’ve
been swallowing my regret. Like diamonds, housed inside of me.
Collecting them all until I’ve built one hell of a necklace.
This necklace that’s really a chain. Except everyone keeps
telling me how beautiful it is. Only I can never take it off.
Only it weighs a fucking ton. But you died on me and
you were the only one with the key. And you died on me.
And I think I died too. And years later I met back up with you
inside of a fantasy. And you were Superman and I was clean again.
You in overalls and me in a red dress. And then no dress. And then
a bedsheet. And then my great-grandmother's quilt. And then
a sweater I thought I’d lost forever. And then back inside
again, staring into space. But then you came back. Walked
out from the inside of a waterfall and grabbed me by the hand.
Pointed out to me the edible types of lilies we could eat. Placed
your hand on the small of my back as we crossed the street
and told me a story about this crazy girl that you saved one
day convulsing from shock. “When you OD, you have to
come back as an EMT,” you explained. “And now my hair is

darker. And my voice is deeper, but it's still me. Isn't it?
I know it's me. Look at my hands," you said. "They're the
same, aren't they?" And I told you yes, they were still
the same. "But you're dead," I said. "You're still dead even
though I still want things from you. We all do." And you
said, "I know. I know. And this is why. This is why I had to die."

Scratching

there is a painting called *Scratching for Life*,
with deep grooves in the wood it was made from.

reminds me of a man who said how everything
he ever let go of, “has claw marks on it.”

i wanted to break the rules.
i wanted to slide my fingertips into the grooves.
but, i leave claw marks too.

we all do,
scratching our way through life.

it scares me, each time.
imagining the damage we will do.
all the marks, all the silver scars.

always clawing, clawing
clawing.
i don't know how not to.

is it that we find someone who doesn't mind?
or, is it that we find someone, with whom,
we stop our clawing?

or, is it that I have to tell you,
here, place mittens over my hands.
here is my heart.
here are the deep grooves inside of me.
place your fingers there.

Burning

Where does your worth reside?

In the attic, in a dusty corner, over there.

A small maroon paper ball, housed beneath the floorboards.

The light is streaming in, shadows drifting through the rafters.

Slices of pure light, like wedding cake.

Remember the light?

Remember when the snow fell at night? Slow and silent, like a secret,
and morning came, brilliant.

White light, a spotlight.

So that we hid beneath the blankets.

We were so close then. So safe. So warm. I know now that I messed all that up.

Messed up what? The snow? The light?

The morning? My body, radiating warmth?

A man walks into the attic with fire in his hands.

He lights me like a flame thrower and finally, I burn.

I am so bright. This, my natural state.

Lit from within and burning, burning, burning.

I was always meant to burn.

Everything has been wrong because I have been waiting,
like a wick, to do what it is that I do best.

Burn the witch. Burn the bitch.

Baby, you are a forest fire, but not a song.

But you tried that one already.

And you don't have a lighter,
and you lost your matches.

And you went out after the snow storm
and heaped snow into big copper bowls.

So that we could eat and eat until our tongues went numb,
until our bodies grew cold, until we had nothing left to say.

He put snow around the rocks to make them easier to swallow.

I put on my swimsuit because you asked, *Don't you want to jump in?*
You're on fire. Jump into the water. You're on fire.

Baby, I am a forest fire.

As I point to him with the book of matches,
and the snow starts to fall.

March

I.

I spent a lonely month
being *lone-ly*.

Doors revolving,
opening and closing.

Two runners on treadmills,
facing one another.

The everyday inanimate,
suddenly attuned.

Even the weather seemed to side
with me, in solidarity.

The sky darkened,
everything gray.

Everything wet,
everything cold.

The wild wind
blowing open doors.

The way I wanted to blow open
the shutters to your soul.

The spring that wasn't spring,
the winter that wasn't winter.

The love that wasn't love.

II.

Mornings spent waking up to the
empty pounding of my heart.

My head already guilty with the thought,
How lucky am I to be so broken?

But everything around me,
a museum of you.

Your empty pillowcase and your toothbrush,

all relics.

Even the shower, a reliquary wherein
I pondered, *How much of you have I consumed?*

All the particles and cells
housed beneath my fingernails.

Dust of your dead skin breathed in, and
your saliva, your semen.

Could I build me a man?

III.

Getting ready in your absence
cracked me open like an egg.

Shell broke, yolk
whisked.

Split, splattered,
fractured.

Coffee without you, the train
without you.

Everything,
without you.

This new binary of,
you and not you.

My eyes shameless and widening
at the sight of the same bag as yours.

Bouncing away, like my heart
in a jar.

Distant televisions streaming
in houses across from me.

Trailing couples,
holding hands.

Always couples,
couples everywhere.

The brilliance and inspiration

born from loneliness.

But, your heart, a sea sponge.
And mine?

An entire fucking ocean.

IV.

Remember the pennies pulled from your pocket,
and the wishes we made on them?

Tossed into a hotel fountain,
lighter than air.

As if we didn't care,
only ever just our deepest fears.

Held momentary and weightless,
made perfect in mid-air.

Full of every goddamn possibility,
an infinity.

What did you wish for?
what did I?

Resentment or death,
the finish lines we strive towards.

Both, inevitable.

V.

A sudden stop on
an elevator floor.

A dog with eyes that
make me weep.

Because finally, something
looking back at me.

With warmth and
with yearning.

Heartbreak paints me
like a house.

So, pour it on. Pour it all over me.

Chasing

The story was never an interesting one.

We made our money. We spent it together.

We ate and we ate, and then we drank and we drank.

And you told me one day, while sitting against an old stone wall, "You'll get sick of me, eventually. You'll see."

And then you kissed me on the mouth, like it was a promise. Like it was a vow.

And the thing is, it was. And I did. Like Halloween as a kid.

Wanting it all, even until it made me sick.

Until my teeth ached and my tongue swelled.

Holding a piece of candy in my cupped palm, just to watch it melt.

The quiet revolt of my body against yours.

I was always a wrapper, never quite shut.

Always a part of me seeping out and dissolving.

Wishing to be made solid again.

We both wanted to be taken for granted.

So that we could never win. We didn't mean anything to him. Or to them. Or to anyone.

Mad dogs running off the edges of the highest cliff. Over and over again.

If I'm a part of your story and your a part of mine, and we're both a part of his, then which one of us gets to write out, 'The End?'