

I Am Not The Sea

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I'm meeting boys who like Bukowski and they all want to do brutal things to my body. They tell me they buy a bottle of whiskey whenever they get one of his books, and don't stop reading until they've gone through a pack of cigarettes. In their new Los Angeles apartments they blow smoke in my face and say, "He was the outcast king of L.A. Did you know that, huh?" "Yeah, I know," I say. "He's great."

A new boy hands me a worn copy of *On the Road* and really thinks he's being original. He says, "we should explore the road together. Would you like that baby?" I take a sip of my water and look away. Yes, I think. I would like that. But he's drunk and imagining himself sixty years earlier, in the back of a bar sweating to the sound of live bop. Still, I prefer him to the hungry boy who devoured my shirt and said, "You have a tattoo? What's it say? 'Mad to live?'" What, are you angry about living? Aw, I'm just kidding around. Come here. Let me take off that bra."

The next boy I kiss does not read. I ask him to come to a bookstore with me and he stays outside, sighing. He has no interest in words. He has no interest in me. I am thankful for him. For a few weeks, I am able to shed my habit of thinking obsessively and become a duller, rougher version of myself. But I force myself to dump him when my fingers start turning imaginary pages in my life.

I go on a date with a boy who knows I like to write. He calls himself a fan of mine and swears he's read every word I've put down. I choke on my food as he says, "I read you to fall asleep." At night, I listen to him pant metaphors and compare my mouth to the sea. One day, he stumbles across my journal and finds nothing about himself in it. "You don't really love me, do you?" he asks. There is no use pretending anymore. He has already read my poems about the boys I want to drown in me. Still, his goodbye leaves my hands covered in ink. He wanted me so badly to be the sea, when all I am is a girl who writes poetry.

I try my best to become poetry. I take a bath and stain the water with black ink. I cut my hair in motel sinks. I cry for people I've never even met. I start rolling my own cigarettes. I use words like "presumptuously" and look deeply into space before answering any questions. I walk the streets at four a.m. and smile at people coming home from raves. I drink coffee instead of water and carry a 500 page volume of poems wherever I go. But no matter how hard I try, I am not the sea. I am a sunken ship that has drowned in everyone who touched me.

## **If You Take Their Insults Back, They'll Have Nothing To Call You Besides Your Name**

If caring too much makes me “weird,”  
then let me be weird.  
Let me be five letters that mean nothing  
besides others cannot count  
the songs that have wounded them  
by the number of bullet holes in their chests.  
Let me be shaking fingers and tears  
the color of ink.

If the lump in my throat is not “inspiration,”  
as I call it, but “weird,”  
then so be it.

I have spent too much energy  
bandaging my punched chest  
to name each Swiss cheese hole.

“Weird,”  
I'll say,  
as I go about stuffing my wounds.  
I have a trumpet for a tongue and  
twenty piano key toes that  
tight-rope over “weird.”  
I am weird.  
What else you got?

## **An Apology to My Body**

I am sorry for filling you with beer and bad thoughts and then asking you why you shook. I am sorry for pinching you, for hitting you, for bruising the thin-skinned parts of you. I am sorry for the names I called you when we were fighting. You are not ugly. You are not useless. You would not be better off gone. I'm sorry for almost throwing you out into the street because my sadness was too much for me. I'm sorry for carving my fingernails into your thigh and then resenting the way people asked, "How'd that happen?" I'm sorry for plucking you and nicking your calves with drugstore razors. I'm sorry I let some people see you in the moonlight. They didn't deserve to know the color of your hips like I do. I'm sorry for leaving you convulsing over a toilet boy over some boy. I'm sorry I never thanked you for simply trying to take me where I wanted to go. I'm sorry that I screamed at you to shrink, shrink, shrink when all you could do was grow. I'm sorry that this apology is ten years too late. I'm sorry that it will probably come again. I'm sorry that I do not treat anybody else as poorly as I have treated you. I'm sorry that I am constantly learning how to love you, when you have never once doubted how you feel about me. I'm sorry in ways I have not yet learned to communicate.

## **I Have Thrown You Into The Sky Because That Is The Only Place Where You Are Safe**

Look girl, you are a holy ocean into which boys willingly plunge. They are standing on your shore, dying to drown in you. Look girl, we can all tell you hold too many untouched continents to count. We have our flags ready, hoping that you will let one of us claim you. Here is the truth: You are not like the others. You ring in our ears, you tangle our vocal chords. We sing you in our sleep. You are not like the rest. You are a bruise, you are a stain. You contain so much of what we want to be that we threaten to drain you completely. So, keep your hills green, your lakes full of fish, your sunsets unphotographed. We will do nothing but cover you in slobber. When we come by the shipload, turn us away. We will only mark you, then leave. And you deserve so much more than our footprints on you.

## A Question, Not A Statement

I bleed poetry and  
think nothing of the consequences.  
Here is how it goes:  
I will never be able to  
offer you a secure idea of who I am.  
I come vaguely,  
leave quietly,  
and am spun entirely  
of soft matter:  
stale smoke  
still sleeping in the air,  
vapid dreams,  
and foggy, barely-formulated ideas.

“Me”  
is more of a question  
than a statement,  
and my life is a tale  
I am still learning how to tell.