

## Nightfall

Two lips pressed against the glass, memory and mind hazy against flecks and flurries.  
A burning wick makes monsters on the ceiling. Charcoal shading filling the air, even in your  
lungs, a stagnant longing for more.

The sound of cicadas in an empty field, tall grass folding against the wind, the moon moving  
behind carefully woven ghost-clouds. A heavy heat that licks and suffocates presses down on a  
sleeping child. Hair matted with salty sweat against red tinted skin. You are dreaming.

Fumbling for broken light switches in an unfamiliar room cloaked in black, a cannon fires once.  
A game of what is real and what isn't. Your mind tricks you and tricks you, again you are stepping  
with care through a room you have spent most of your life in, a shifting of depressed hues, a  
lurching of walls.

The sound of rushing water, of leaving and coming back, of your hand in front of your face, buried  
in shadows. The gentle breathing of trees, a shudder that echoes like the petticoat of a young  
woman dancing, or the long hiss of a reptile.

Your soul missing another. Squinting into temporary blindness, memory alight with the orange  
glow of the bathroom light, head back as loving fingers massage shampoo into your scalp followed  
by cups of warm water pouring through now clean hair, skin the smell of peach soap. A walk  
through the rain, old fingers intertwined with young, the feeling of never being alone.

In darkness, you are always alone.

A lightening of the sky, like adding white sugar and milk, the darkness succumbs to dawn, blending  
and fading- *diluting*. A sense of awakening in daylight, the knowledge of electing to forget the  
dark and embrace the light.

## Grandmother

1

You are a fragile, snoring skeleton resting beneath over-starched white hospital blankets. My lungs need to be reminded to Breathe. Your veins have extension cords hooked up to loud machines that interrupt my thoughts with hisses and beeps. This room feels like a stagnant ribcage, waiting to crush me.

2

You are fading, becoming an empty shell, a barely breathing carcass. My fingers find yours, beneath the tubes and cords, I hold on tight to bones and flesh, motionless fingers, a limp cold hand. Your hair is the color of moonlight.

I will always remember the way we danced.

3

Swollen thoughts of you fill the trenches of empty spaces in the sleepy shadows of my brain at night. Memories like motor cars race through chiasms, never stopping, never slowing down. Homemade Chocolate Gobs the color of shiny black pavement staked like pyramids in the sun-selling for a quarter a piece, carving plump pumpkins on the sidewalk, and hearts rushing with laughter on sleds down Blueberry Hill. Tunes of *When Irish Eyes are Smiling*.

The heart is a muscle that never forgets.

4

My body is still learning how to let you go. Flushed, red faces wet with the kind of sadness that makes your stomach hurt, whisper memories of *before*. We all held hands around you like a womb prepared to birth you into death as we sang *Amazing Grace* through knotted larynxes. Blue and red rectangles of light flash silently on lonely machines. The ICU is like a gaping mouth, waiting to swallow up the sick, leaving nothing but an empty beeping and a collection of quiet organs.

The Things We Don't Talk About  
(For Mom)

1.

Mom, the things we don't talk about speak to me in my sleep. I am haunted by the army of malignant light chains that breed inside your bones, preparing war plans to attack your already weakened heart. Your heart sits like a queen bee within the flood gates of stagnant bone and spongy tissue, the castle walls of your temple.

2.

Cancer. Cancer. Cancer- if you say it enough times, will it one day lose its power? Or does it work like an incantation, like calling Beetle Juice or Bloody Mary in the mirror, you have to be careful how many times you say it--lest you might invoke it?

3.

In your Oncologist waiting room you stubbornly tell me that you don't *have* cancer, that what you have is a cousin to cancer. Cousins are supposed to be relatives you see on holidays, not a swarm of anarchist protein trying to take over your body. Maybe we should talk about the word protein too...

4.

I don't agree with the way you left me in the car for an hour when I was five, because I didn't want to go into the grocery store. Or the way you cut my hair. I don't agree with the fact that you were always an hour late picking me up from softball practice. I don't agree with the foods you eat, how you hardly ever sleep, or the fact that you might die.

5.

I don't want to talk about death. But every day a ghost stares back at me through your bruised and tired body and I find myself looking for signs of the end with a mixture of anger and relief. I don't want to talk about how scared you are. How scared I am. So, we don't. We don't talk about the tiny soldiers of death deep within the channels and canals of your body that are chipping away at your organs. We don't talk about the things that make us afraid, because pain is a cracked sheet of ice that you stand upon, a bath tub over filled that threatens to spill onto the floor. We don't talk about it, because we can't.