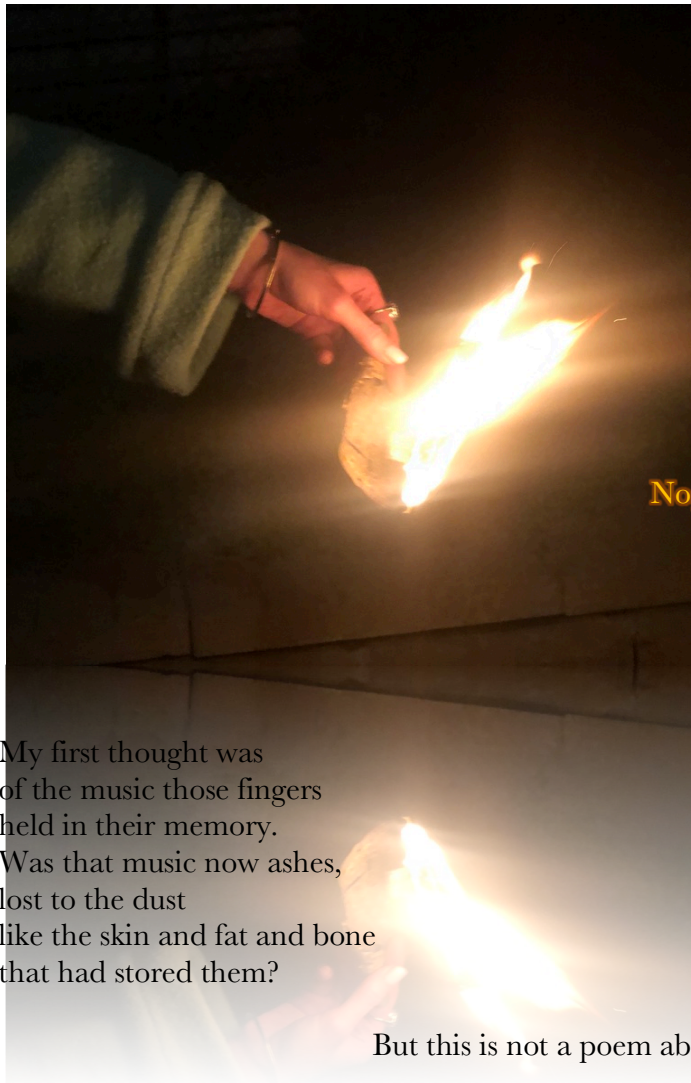


## The Memory in My Pinky

Fingers have memories.  
I never knew that  
till I saw my father's crispy husks  
at the hospital that first day after the fire.  
The elegant nails and  
agile tips:  
Blackened  
Shriveled  
Unrecognizable.



My first thought was  
of the music those fingers  
held in their memory.  
Was that music now ashes,  
lost to the dust  
like the skin and fat and bone  
that had stored them?

But this is not a poem about my father.

The sinew between them  
pulled taut  
like the strings of his beloved  
guitar, wound sharp beyond  
the proper pitch –  
Though these strings were so sharp  
they pulled the frets out of order  
and bent the very neck of the vessel.

My first thought was not  
of the harm those fingers had  
inflicted –

No, it was not how mi papá had used them for  
ill, and perhaps earned their loss.

I saw at once:  
There is no harm he could have caused to  
earn that grief.

This is a poem about my fingers.

How my fingers always know  
when I am touching the right card  
- they tingle and grow warm.  
How my fingers do know  
when I'm singing the note right  
- they freeze, and even now, they tremble.  
How did my fingers know  
your hand, the first time we touched?  
Why do they ache, down to their  
connecting joints  
when you are out of reach?

Even my pinky remembers how  
good you feel  
in my hands.

I cannot unknow  
los recuerdos de mis manos.  
To unlearn your touch,  
I fear,  
would require a fire that twisted  
my instrument into something  
mythically unrecognizable.

And even then, would my fingers take  
after mi padre in their stubborn knowledge,  
just as they do in their length  
and skill and grace?

You see, my father is making music again.  
It's not the same –  
no, it may never be lo mismo –  
pero it is something  
Promethean to witness.  
And so I reach for you again,  
and my fingers sigh their relief  
into yours,  
and your fingers respond in kind

## The Coffee Table

When I was four years old  
I shattered my parents' glass coffee table.  
Decades later, I still dream about it:  
The initial crunch  
and ensuing waterfall tinkle  
of the shattering plate,  
the reflecting light over my head  
on the ceiling,  
how surprising the flaming lick of pain  
was in the soft pink flesh of my feet,  
the heat and viscous wetness of my blood  
coating the cold sharp foreign pieces of glass.

When she told me the truth with a condescending sigh,  
I was kneeling on your bed  
in a pool of pink and purple light from  
the warm early spring sun pouring through your window,  
refracting through the glass print of our kiss.  
Every hair on my body stood up  
and fell back down. I forget  
how I ended the conversation. I know  
I grabbed the half-full tequila bottle and drank the whole thing while I called you eight times and  
finally texted you:  
Pick up, you coward.

The coffee table dreams, though:  
they always start with me in the middle of the  
sea of glass and blood and empty frame.  
I forget exactly how such a small person  
made such a big mess.  
If I asked my mother,  
she would probably say I was dancing on it  
or claim my sister did it  
or question whether we had even had  
a glass table to break in the first place.





Memory is fiendish, that way:

I remember specific lines from this play  
but not what I was holding in my hand  
when I asked if you had lied to me  
when I asked if you had fucked her  
(twice)

And you said “yes” and

I think you said “I’m sorry.”

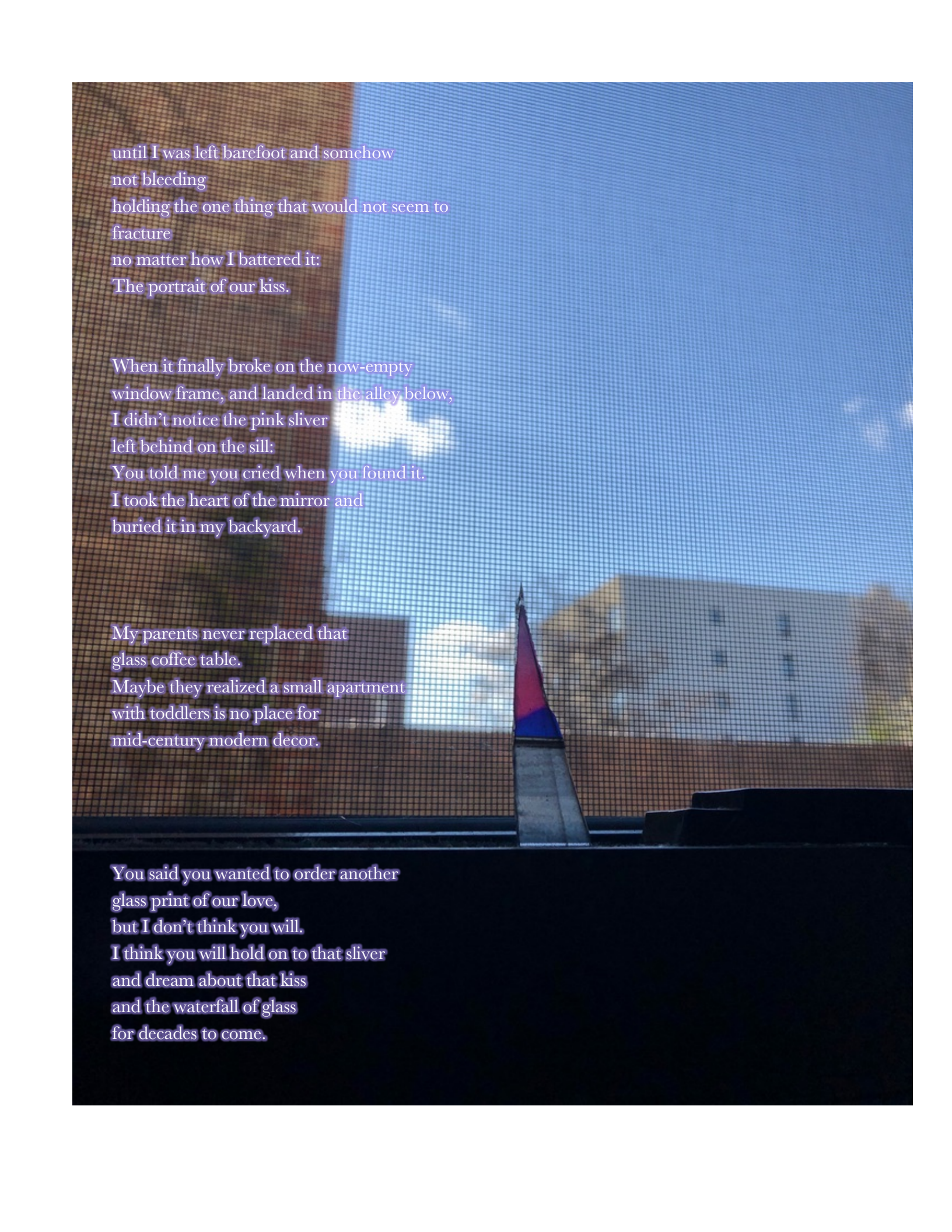
At that point, I know I was standing on the other side of the bed,  
looking at the window  
looking at the love light,  
and whatever was in my hand  
flew

and broke the window  
and rattled the pink kiss pane.

It was the clinking sound of glass on glass,  
the way our melting kissing selves seemed to  
mock me with their joy,  
that made me scramble,  
tiger-like,  
over the bed to pull down that fragile gift.

It was the empty “sorrlys” that drove my hand  
or it was the memory of the night before,  
how you laid your head on my breast  
and whispered that you loved coming home to me,  
or it was the ghost of the pain in my feet  
from childhood, that raised that portrait  
and systematically shattered every  
glass surface in your room –  
each pane of the window  
the tv  
the antique mirror you almost gave to  
one of your sisters, till I insisted  
on giving it to you for Christmas –





until I was left barefoot and somehow  
not bleeding  
holding the one thing that would not seem to  
fracture  
no matter how I battered it:  
The portrait of our kiss.

When it finally broke on the now-empty  
window frame, and landed in the alley below,  
I didn't notice the pink sliver  
left behind on the sill:  
You told me you cried when you found it.  
I took the heart of the mirror and  
buried it in my backyard.

My parents never replaced that  
glass coffee table.  
Maybe they realized a small apartment  
with toddlers is no place for  
mid-century modern decor.

You said you wanted to order another  
glass print of our love,  
but I don't think you will.  
I think you will hold on to that sliver  
and dream about that kiss  
and the waterfall of glass  
for decades to come.



Obviously this metaphor requires balance,  
a light touch,  
it is so symbolic as to be laughable:  
He bought me a bike.

Here, love: here is your freedom.  
But also, here, love: here is the proof:  
Here is my love, solid and dependable,  
with a frame I patched up with  
my own two strong hands.

Riding a bike after fifteen years is  
not at all like riding a bike.  
My body does not remember,  
not fully,  
how to balance  
how launch forward  
when to pedal  
when to coast  
when to switch gears  
how to smoothly brake to a clean stop  
without kicking at the curb.

I do love the push, the climb  
the exertion of defying  
gravity to sail up a hill,  
keeping eyes ever vigilant for  
cars or worse their doors,  
but as I coast along the ridge  
as it begins to descend again  
doubt comes in,  
crawling up my hips and into my belly  
coating my palms on the handlebars  
with a dew of fear that makes  
clicking the gear higher stakes:  
will this be the moment I am  
unable to slow down  
to halt when I should,  
is this the time I cross the uncrossable line  
and will I be rewarded with the press  
of gravel and metal and pain and blood?

Is that punishment what I am  
seeking when I send him that text:  
thinking about going for a ride  
?

I know enough to know  
sometimes (often) smart women make  
bad decisions, like the better you  
are at being there for your friends  
the worse you are at showing up  
for yourself, like being able to interpret  
Chopin, or quote Shakespeare,  
or cure the plague,  
preoccupies so much of your faculties  
there is simply not a burner left  
on which to keep the kettle  
of your heart warm.

## Like Riding a Bike

So I snap on my helmet  
which can't protect my most fragile organ  
(as a wise but problematic professor  
tells each incoming theatre class,  
"You cannot put a condom  
on your heart,"  
by which she means,  
"Don't fuck your classmates  
and bring the mess to class,"  
but which many students take as  
a personal invitation to a quest  
to fuck as many as possible,  
and by now, surely, she knows this?)  
and I meet him on the road.

On two wheels  
we can't look at one another  
as we speak the wind  
steals key words, growing the mystery  
and making a mockery  
of our fickle friend the truth.  
When we pause to change directions,  
breathless, it is impossible not to blossom  
in the warmth of the shared sun  
between us.

When I ride ahead, I almost feel  
safe, with him at my six  
and the open lane before me.  
I am relearning  
how to ride, singing in the evening breeze  
that tugs the strings of my mask loose  
flashing my smile for the grieving world to see.  
I am rewriting my definition of love  
but haven't yet landed on one  
where we'll both be free  
a love that encompasses my dignity  
and forgiveness  
a love that can rise from the ashes:  
is it too much to ask of such a light word?

Too soon the ride is ended  
before it has really begun  
and we are each left to chart a new course  
alone.

Maybe we should have found a tandem.

## Defenestration

Is such a beautiful word  
For such an ugly act.

Once when my baby sister was pregnant  
She had to get her phone replaced twice in one month:

Her baby daddy

Defenestrated

The phone  
And its replacement.

At my lowest moments, for some reason  
I think of this word

Defenestrate

And want to cry at its terrible allure:

Why

Why fly

Why fly so high

Why fly so high in the sky

(We used to wail these words as a warm up  
in voice and speech, remember?)

And I think of the people who chose

Defenestration

On that bright September morning  
And I think of the people watching them,  
Not on the news  
But on the other side of the office.  
For surely there were souls who,  
Instead of running down those endless stairs

Or leaping into the abyss of blue

Stayed put, stayed still  
As the building crumbled and closed in  
And took them down too.

I feel seared to the floor, too:  
I can't seem to lift a foot to run  
To flee from the crumbling carcass of our love  
And I can't seem trust  
And make the leap to fly.

Instead I stand staring dumbly  
Growing more numb by the millisecond  
Till I am no longer connected to the flesh that  
Longs for you.

It feels like my love has

Defenestrated

From my body.

They call the eyes the windows of the soul:  
Maybe now that these windows have been opened  
To the truth long enough,  
My heart sidled over to them  
While I slept so many nights alone  
And silently, without warning

Leapt free.



## **Never Can Say No**

I know I never can say no to you  
And worse, I think that's what you want to hear  
Each time you smile and say you love me, true.

The truth is that you obfuscate my view  
And when you dimple at me and hold me near:  
I know I never can say no to you.

And I wonder: do you have a clue?  
It touches some wet wound inside, my dear  
Each time you smile and say you love me, true

When you leave, it cleaves my world in two  
And in your absence, I see my heart quite clear:  
Return, I never can say no to you.

My bones ache, you turn my vision blue  
With the churn and yearn of primal fear:  
No more to see you smile, your love's untrue.

Each time we meet again like deja vu  
We touch, we kiss, we cross the next frontier  
I know I never can say no to you:  
No, not when you say you love me, true.