

Life As A Game Of Pinball

A bell rings and you are flung upwards.
In this brief arc of time you believe
you are moving straight into god's pure heart,
before you have even learned language,
before you were ever taught the word "god".

Above you the sky is clear glass,
and past it you can see large looming things
but cannot touch them.

The ascent lasts for only a moment,
before you descend in a terrifying rush.
You bounce off rubber walls
and wildly strike jackpots.
When the first jackpot rings you start to think
maybe *that* is the music of your existence.
So then, you try to hit as many as you can.

Every night at bedtime you fall through a hole,
not knowing whether you will be gone forever,
or if you will reappear the next morning,
ready to be hurled through it all again.

Repeatedly you come very close
to the black abyss, tumble down slopes—
gravity has its way with you relentlessly.
But somehow, a force outside of yourself
propels you back to fight your way,
again and again,
through that glittering maze.

Eventually, though, you will have to sink
through the drain at the bottom,
nothing lit up any longer,
no bells' sweet song singing—
because at this point
you will silently navigate
the underworld of the machine's dark coils.

And then you will line up with the other lost ones,
and then you will recognize how identical their faces all are to yours,
and that each one of you is still
as perfect and pure as the day you were formed.

The Centipede

I killed a centipede with a book
that once taught me how to revise my poems.
I killed it ruthlessly, smashed it
without a second thought to the life I was taking.
How easily, I ground it into the carpet, and repeatedly,
to make sure it could not come back to haunt me.

The book's spine split the creature's body into several pieces,
chunks of legs sprawled out around
its still head, and immediately I felt
a surge of relief. I am safe.

But then the leg fragments started to twitch,
independent of its body,
and this stunned me.
How could they move
when they had been severed from their head,
their body, and their heart?

Their nerves kept firing,
even after my slaughter.
A minute later I still stood
fascinated, above them.
And I thought, yes *this*,
this is how I love him.
—taken from his head,
forbidden from his body,
gone from his heart,
knowing I can never be rejoined
to what I used to be connected to,
but still moving in tiny
helpless ways, all on my own.

Looner

A person infatuated by balloons is a *looner*.
Some looners enjoy popping the balloon,
while others become devastated by the thought.

Looners will fill their homes with balloons
to keep them company. They will fill their hearts
with balloons to keep their chests held up.

Sometimes looners will drive around town
and rescue mistreated balloons.
They snatch the abandoned ones,
the ones left out in the hot sun,
from car dealerships and birthday parties.

They are most aroused when they fondle
the bellybutton of a bright red balloon.
They are calmed completely down when they rest
a pure white balloon on their palms.

For the ones who like to pop them,
the sound of piercing a balloon is intense adrenaline—
as if everything that's existed
and everything that will ever exist
in the whole world
penetrates the balloon, all at once.

Guilt

I slept through the rain all afternoon—
the gray way animals sleep
when they are afraid. I saw the thousands
of ways you would kill yourself:
your body a failed bird as it leapt from a rooftop,
or bullets as they tore through that mouth
that longed to kiss every part of me.
I saw white pills as they disappeared into your stomach—
small circular soldiers sent to destroy.
I saw ropes, saw train tracks, saw pocket knives.
Saw the blood abandoning your body, as I have.

The doorbell woke me, little song of death,
and through the peephole saw
that two police officers stood there,
with their hats and shoes polished.
I just shook—my limbs felt tremors
from earthquakes on the other side
of the world. The coldest terror seized me.
I thought certainly they were coming to tell me
you were dead. I answered the door saying
i'm sorry, i'm sorry, i'm sorry.

In The End

In my defense, your honor,
I didn't know it would end up like this.
I didn't know the radio
would play all the sad songs
on nights we needed happiness the most.
I didn't know we would one day
have nothing left to say to each other
except to take off our clothes, expose our wounds,
and say *look, look at what you did.*