

Shelves

I read the last page first.
I don't want to love a character
only to have them die
before they are old
and as ready as a person can be.
So many books I'll never touch again,
though they remain shelved
to maintain appearances.
Even poor Piggy still resides
with those wretched boys
in my green book from seventh grade
along with *The Pearl*,
a slim book that proves
I've attempted Steinbeck again
even though he killed Lennie
who longed for rabbits
about whom I'll never read again.

Convalescence

I am a terrible bedmate, waking myself
and anyone in earshot with my babbling
mouth. The sheets need daily washing
or the scent of last night's
fear-sweat keeps me awake.

Before I started the medication,
I often dreamed I was in a warm conservatory lush with plants
air moist but not uncomfortably humid. I'd clamber up
to the highest point I could reach and jump
without a second's hesitation.

Diving sharply towards the floor until I'd arch my body
swooping down skimming moss with my fingertips.
Those delicious lucid dreams a razor contrast
to the waking hours I spent swerving my car
trying not to run over figments of my imagination.

Driving kids home from school,
I'd spend each break at the stoplights
visualizing the little boys in my back seat
lying broken and bloodied in the road
from an accident I caused.

My subconscious is now ruled by the pills
that make daytime possible,
though they twist my nights into foul fantasy.

We are all smoking cigarettes and my father
is out gambling our family's last dollar,
and when he comes back, he looks like
Gandalf the Grey and takes out a pistol
and shoots me in the stomach because it is
my fault all the money is gone.

I know I'm going to die,
I will bleed out at the same moment
I drop my cigarette to the floor.

Cathedrals

He told me his mother took him
to visit cathedrals when he was small.
He talked about the mineral coldness of the marble
and his awe at the vaulted ceilings.
He said he wanted to learn Latin,
so he could read the inscriptions
carved into floor memorializing
the dead.

His cathedrals were succulent bait
and I was a naïve and hungry fish.
I salivated at the sound of his tender descriptions
while he pulled tighter at the hook in my mouth,
that I was too busy being infatuated to feel.

When he finished reeling me in,
the hazy beauty of his cathedrals vanished.
He began to fiddle with the zipper
of my jeans and his mouth insisted
that I wanted to offer my body to him
as thanks for his poetic stories.

My mind snapped awake,
I was no longer a drowsy fish in the shallows.
I pulled away, no's rising up loudly from my mouth
while I moved further and further across the room.
But this fisherman had not gone to the trouble
of reeling me in just to let me go.

So he took my body,
and while I bled onto the sheets
he told me that this,
the violation and the pain,
was what I had wanted all along.
Waiting for his thrusts to cease,
I prayed to the God of his mother's cathedrals
for mercy.

Hinge

You are the aluminum wrapper
clinging to the piece of gum
I toss into my mouth. Your
shiny surface meets with
the filling in my back molar
shooting a sharp cringe through
my limbs. I shake my head
trying to escape the sensation.

You are the hinge of the door
where my forefinger is pinched
the pad swelling and rising into
a purple welt on my skin
where a perfect fingerprint
used to be.

You are the oddly pigmented mole
on my arm, growing rapidly.
I try and excise you, my melanoma,
but when I dig at your margins
you expand, rooting deeper
in my flesh.

You are the flashback
that startles me awake,
just as I was drifting off,
keeping me up until
I have prayed through
the Lord's Prayer
fifty times at least.

Nighttime

I'm dreaming that I'm a small boy from India
with a knack for solving crimes. Walking
with my mother and grandmother along
our neighborhood street, we pass a
wheezing grey building.
My grandmother mumbles
that she is sure she's been here before.

Now I'm in a wedding dress,
for my mandatory marriage to a slippery
looking fellow I met in rehab.
Our wedding is in a blow-up castle,
like the ones you rent for kids' parties,
only it isn't a castle anymore
it's an inflatable backyard barbecue and
garage complete with tools for working
on the air-filled convertible we own.

I am alone looking for my mother.
In the thick smokey air I'm coughing violently,
but I can hear my sister's voice shouting,
"you will never be with her ever again."
I race around the stone house
that appears before me
and I see my mother through one
of the dirty window panes and I
hammer my fists on the glass
and scream "Mommy, Mommy!"

Now it's 3AM and I'm here again
in my sticky sheets, assessing the
pool of sweat between my breasts.
My bladder is full and I need fresh pajamas
as these are soaked through.
Soon sleep will catch me again
and it's back to facing a mirror only
to watch all of my teeth
scatter on the ground like little seeds
while I slide my tongue around
my mouth feeling newly smooth
and empty gums.