

## **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, I tell you this:

Keep your hills green, your lakes full of fish,

your sunsets unphotographed.

We will do nothing but cover you in slobber.

Keep your trees standing, your passion demanding,

your heart shining like the moon.

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.

## **How To Change For Love**

When your mom tells you that “young women should be soft,”  
with stained lips and pretty curls, listen.

Soft, she’ll say, like the girls she’ll point out on T.V.

Pour over magazines, looking for a way to sandpaper your rough edges.

Read articles on how to flirt, how to find a foundation for your skin tone,  
how to know if he likes you.

Resent your hair for the way it flips.

Resent your chin for being prone to zits.

Resent yourself for being too large, too loose, too much.

When your mom comments that you’ve put on weight,  
apologize.

Your final year of high school, meet a boy

who prefers secondhand shirts to the ones his mom buys him on his birthday.

Take his offer to drive you home and say, “yes”

when he asks you if you like the Brian Jonestown Massacre,  
even though you’ve never listened to them.

Prioritize sitting with him by a lake and smoking cigarettes  
before doing your homework.

Come home reeking of secondhand smoke and guilt  
as your mom asks you why your grades have dropped.

When he asks you to spend the night, call her and lie.

Tell her you are sleeping at a friend’s.

Laugh at how easy it is.

Feel lucky as he giggles your name beneath  
the covers before rolling on top of you.  
Stay still beneath him until he returns to his side, panting,  
as you swish the word “virginity” around your mouth.  
Laugh at how easy it was to lose.

When he tells you that you wear too much makeup, feel foolish all at once,  
like you should have known  
the thick eyeliner you carefully smudged beneath your eyes  
was too much.

Mutter an apology as you excuse yourself to the bathroom,  
where you wipe most of it off with a rough paper towel.  
Go weeks with a bare face, until he touches your arm in the hallway and says,  
“You look really tired. Is it just your face or something?”

When he wants to try something new, do not ask him if it will hurt.  
Be soft. Be still. Keep telling him you’re okay.  
Tell yourself it will be over soon.  
Remember something you read in a book once,  
a piece of advice English mothers would give their daughters  
on their wedding nights.

Follow it. Just “close your eyes and think of England.”

Do not apologize to your friends when they ask where you’ve been.  
Convince yourself you’ve really been busy, then

invite them to hang out with you and your boyfriend.

Swallow the uneasy feeling in your stomach as you pretend not to see them cringe.

Tell yourself they don't know what they're talking about  
when they say you've changed.

That you have changed, but only because you wanted to.

After graduation, ignore your mother.

Ignore your friends.

Ignore the well-meaning teacher who went out of her way to tell you,

“Some things seem right, but they're not.”

Move in with him anyway.

Laugh and talk about sleeping in the same bed for the next 30 years.

Drink coffee together in the mornings,

walk hand-in-hand to class afterwards.

Spend your nights with eyes glazed over,

watching the free channels of T.V.

until you both get bored and lead each other to bed.

Learn that he gets angry when you come home later than expected,  
even if it is only twenty minutes.

Learn that he does not seem as cute when he's drinking  
when he does it every night.

Learn that his voice is not always a soft coo,  
that sometimes it erupts as a bellow that will leave you red-eyed.

Start considering showers your alone time.

Start pretending you are already asleep when he touches you in bed.

Tell him you love him.

Forget what it means.

Find yourself getting lost in your town on a day-to-day basis.

Regularly leave your home and wander for hours,  
until you are somewhere you've never been, never seen.

Berate yourself for walking aimlessly again,  
but do not feel a pull to find your way home.

Remind yourself it wasn't always this way.

That you used to be the sort of person parents said  
had "a good head on their shoulders."

That friends used to admire you  
for declaring that you loved being alone and would likely never get married,  
not when the divorce rate is so high.

That awhile ago,  
you were a girl who knew nothing about  
studying billboards and magazines for a way to leave.

Remind yourself that you used to be so rough around the edges,  
so full of spitfire and desire, so full of plans.

Ah, but this is how you changed for love.

## **An Apology**

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.

For shoving you into clothing that  
left rough red indents on your skin.

For studying every section of you in a mirror  
and making a checklist of things about you  
that needed to change.

I'm sorry I let some boys see you in the moonlight.

They didn't deserve to know the color of your hips like I do.

I'm sorry that I used you as a tool to get others to talk to me.

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 you are all I have to show the world and yet  
, I treat you not like a vessel, a body, but a burden I am stuck with.

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 Am Not The Sea**

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 till they've gone through a pack of cigarettes. In their clean 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, yeah, I know," I say. "He's great."

A new boy gives me a worn copy of *On the Road* and really thinks he's being original. "We should explore the road together. Would you like that, baby?" I take a sip of my water and look away. Yes, I'd like that, I think. 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 that devoured my shirt and said, "You have a tattoo? What's it say?" "Mad to live?" What, are you angry about living? Oh come on, I'm just kidding. Come here, let me take off that bra."

The next boy I kiss doesn't 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 finally force myself to dump him when my fingers start turning imaginary pages in my sleep.

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. "You've got this voice that's very modern, but also so classic," he says. I nod, and then choke on my water as he tells me, "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. I shake my head. There is no use pretending anymore. He has read my poems about the boys I want to drown in me. His goodbye leaves my hands covered in ink. The poor boy 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 a motel sink. I cry for people I have never met. I start smoking cigarettes. I use words like “presumptuously” and talk about “post-modernist new wave.” I walk the streets at 4 a.m. and smile at people coming home from a rave. I wear sunglasses indoors. I carry a 500 page volume of poems wherever I go. I drink coffee instead of water. I talk about the “advantages of using film and listening to records.” 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.