

## Buried

*Achieving fame is something like when smoking,  
sticking your cigar in your mouth by the lighted end.*

—*Vincent Van Gogh*

as i write in my journal  
i imagine my mother reading  
the words after i die i suppose  
she's the only person who would

still it feels more self-indulgent  
than laying down on the freeway

i identify my trauma not  
my obsession with famegloryworship  
my fear of attention  
not my being forgotten  
or of fame being as disappointing  
as the cold wanting of it

the poetry i've written lately i could burn  
to fill my apartment with the black  
smoke that borders memories I like

to stare at the sun for too long  
until I can move the black fuzz  
ball of blindness  
all i have to do is climb through this wormhole  
and leave my shoes in the grass

my girlfriend's prehistoric dark yellow  
eyes avoiding eyes  
avoiding sun self  
loathing is a selfish game i'm not sure  
i have the ability to forgo it  
to not believe i'm unique

as a teaspoonful of neutron star  
weighing six billion tons  
my emotions are wet sand: heavy coarse  
barely cohesive annoying like my survival kit

## **Abandoned: Fairfield Hills Children's Mental Hospital**

Hopping the chain-linked fence  
I pry the front door open,  
flip my phone to cast a blue orb  
over cubbies and sign-in sheets covered in pale dust.  
Stretching for eternity, two hundred feet  
of hallway exits under a neon sign  
still grinning after forty years.

I touch door after door of children's  
bedrooms: Dorothy, Isabel, Frank.  
Opening every single one, I try to tease out rumored  
headless babies, the ghosts of hysterical mothers.  
Yearning to find a drooling boy in a straitjacket  
or a panicked girl harnessed to a bed frame,  
all I see are cribs, tiny dresses, and damaged  
dolls, but no bodies left behind, not even an echo.  
Only the dolls left headless.

Lured by the EXIT's glare, I creep forwards,  
wanting a story that is not mine to tell.  
Surely all rooms are not  
hollow, but this is the case.

I find nothing to use as metaphor,  
no graphic details to startle a reader.

Did the forsaken children feel this way?  
Hopeful, sleepy-eyed, dragging blankets  
to the sign's false promise?

When headlights flood the entrance windows,  
bending from a patrol car circling  
the cul-de-sac, I snap  
my phone shut, hold my breath  
in the inflamed glow and white noise  
of whirring crickets.

I can leave  
by that door, unlike mold overhead,  
which was once alive.

## Currency of Grief

In person, I hold back a smile  
when someone tells  
me bad news. At first, something  
so sad can seem zany.

Defense mechanisms  
do not work via text.

Like reading a string of advertisements:  
Coca-Cola, Progressive Insurance,  
Zion died this morning, Dodge Ram,  
the text from my roommate  
withheld any buffer.

My face cooked.

I couldn't absorb the pain,  
only craved to pass it on,  
to impart solemn shock on the unknowing.

But if I got the text already,  
who wouldn't know by now?  
And wouldn't re-announcement  
appear shameful? Darkly indulgent?  
*He was only 21.*

It's no wonder people text.

When I found a mutual friend  
in the rain. He was under  
an umbrella. I stood below a red maple  
in soaked jeans. I read  
his body language as we spoke:

Hey, how are you? ... [       ] ... Did you hear  
about Zion? ... [       ] ... He's dead.

## **Transmutation**

My 28-day drug rehab group  
hiked the naked late-winter Berkshires  
and formed a circle near a ledge.

The mountain range's spine  
arched in the backdrop as we passed  
a book of animal omens.

*Just let a page pick you.*

I wanted an elephant or a bear,  
anything fierce, large & loved,  
but when I parted pages  
a snake appeared:

coiled, lithe, licking the air  
and a deep-seeded evil in me stirred.  
I knew this was the right page,  
sneaky, hated, poisonous.

*Transmutation*, the book prophesied,  
the changing of forms and as a snake slithers out  
of its own skin, I wished to do the same.

As a snake's heart shifts  
to make room for swallowed prey,  
I, too, pushed my heart away,  
wanted to hide in grasses unseen,  
desired to squeeze, strangle, choke  
until I heard everything break.

The counselor said, *Find something to throw  
off the cliff*. I picked up a branch,  
approached the jagged trees below

like acres of steel wool, threw  
the branch into the empty  
space like a spear, it wobbled,  
descended into the valley.

Twirling, spinning  
like a snake.

## Six Thousand Dollars

*And they, since they  
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.  
—Robert Frost*

Neighbors heard a loud pop.  
*Just another New Year's Eve firework.*  
I got the texted photo from my buddy.  
Kevin's porch crossed in caution tape  
followed by, "I think I'm gonna be sick."

It would take three years for the killer  
to be found in Texas. Some guy  
who owed Kevin a few grand in cocaine debt  
shot him instead of paying.

My thumbs pirouetted above the keypad.  
"No fucking way," I typed. "Kevin knew  
we loved him." But I was lying,  
of course he couldn't know that.  
I think that's why I called his mother  
in New Jersey the next morning.

As she bawled, I held the phone out at arm's length.

Kevin had asked me if I wanted to spend  
that New Year's Eve together. The one where police  
found his body face down in his boxers,  
an exit wound beneath his forehead.

I told him, I already had plans.

When I think of Kevin, freebasing  
Percocet, pills melting into sludge,  
white smoke slithering through a hollow  
pen, his cough like screeching tires,

I know he died before his mother saw  
what he had become. At his funeral, I hugged  
his mother, she whispered, *Don't be a stranger.*