

“Sing”

I shift and I teeter on the edge of
our bed. Sunday. Outside the room's
shut door – loud bangs on the kitchen
floor – he yells and curses.

I'm feeling brave this morning.
A sharp, cool burst of water fills
my throat. I felt it two weeks ago,
and two before.

Last night I was too tired. It's easier –
somehow safer – to dodge the Fuck You's
hurtling at my face when he comes
home, his mouth foaming spittles
of liquor and wine. Until he – exhausted –
falls into bed. And I crawl next to him, only
drifting off when his deep snores fill the room.

It happens like this. Why would you stay,
I used to wonder. Sunlight flows through
shadeless windows onto my back, warm
hands urging me forward. So ready to
holler, so eager to sing.

His bare feet, heavy on hardwood,
get louder, and the door slams open.
Our cat scurries under a corner
dresser. I startle and stare.

He already starts to bark.
I gulp down the water,
and with it,
my song.

“Peer-less”

You don't smile anymore -
Mister.

I'm at my teacher desk,
grabbing for a pen, when
his words from nowhere
hit me, like ice water
in the face.

I look at him, this six-year-old
with his impossibly long lashes
that flicker, up and down, deep
dark clear eyes, up and down.

Kids in small groups
spread around the room.
Constant chatter. They
are there, but not.
I only hear him.

How come -
Mister?

A teacher's life is checked
at the door, a mentor once said.
A tingle creeps in my throat,
burning, up and down.

We look at each other, he and
I. Five, ten endless seconds of
silence. How can a face not be
painted with life - a loss, a
break-up, a death? Those
are mine.

I swallow and stand, a palm
resting on his fuzzy trimmed head.
My eyes on the classroom door,
his still on me, I breathe.

And walk away.

“One Second”

A bed full of pillows feels cluttered.
Like a table piled high with half-read
magazines and un-shelved books.

The best sleep comes from a
clear surface. But there you are.
I didn't sleep with two pillows
before there was you. Now, my
bed feels incomplete without it.

What is an unused pillow
if not a mis-used one?

You are not there, have not been there.
I sleep alone – stick to one side – as if
you will come in the night and lie down,
on this bed big enough for two.

You never do. But it's there –
taunting, hopeful. If I want
cushiony comfort, no matter
how angular your body, it
could be that.

We could leave the other one
there, that would be okay. If
our heads shared one, our
faces close, we would breathe
the same sliver of air.

But while I never needed it
before, never wanted it before
you, I don't put the second
pillow away, like a too-thick
blanket in summer.

Putting it away would
mean giving up now.

On you, love.