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Skin

Maria DiPaolo
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Skin

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of English

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

Master of Arts

By

Maria DiPaolo

May 2020

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Abstract

Skin is an autobiographical book of free verse poetry written from the point of view of a female narrator. The poems in this book artfully depict both the futile struggles and moments of euphoria and self-revelation of a young woman who grew up in a broken home. The narrator uses her passion to form meaningful and deep relationships with other people, her sexuality, and her fascination and curiosity of the world around her as not only a coping mechanism, but also a form of self-expression. Each individual poem serves as a snapshot of a single moment in the narrator's life; however, every piece comes together to tell a cohesive story that may integrate and explicate the diverse attitudes of the poems independently. Self-reflection is a main theme addressed in this book and it is important to note that the poems were written over the course of a ten-year period, so it may be considered a type of coming-of-age project as well. The intended audience for such a piece would primarily be, but is not excluded to, teenage and young adult women. This book is an emotional vessel for both memories gained and lessons learned through life, mistakes, love, and loss.

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lost

pt. 1

they ask me if i'm okay now and i say yes for the sake of a night more quiet than the look behind their eyes when i tell them the truth.

truth is, i've lost twenty pounds in two weeks.

it feels better than the time i was twenty and i drunkenly accepted a blunt filled with cocaine by accident because i don't do drugs and i never have, except that night, and i looked in the mirror and saw weeping willows in my eyes but i wasn't even scared, so i drove home and my friend screamed profanities in my ear while i struggled to keep my eyes on the parallel yellow lines in place of the back of my eyelids, red and blue lights flashed warning in my rear view.

now the mirror reminds me that my hipbones were merely hiding for six years.

everyone tells me i look great, but then— how did i look before if great is now, but it still isn't beautiful?

sincerely, yours

she brought a room to complete
attention with one footstep
into the door; she was loud, and
beautiful, and she drank vodka
and showed up on doorsteps
at three am and they let her in
because, she was terribly beautiful.

she became the reason i walked
out of burning buildings alive and
i gave up Jameson so i could save her
and she shook like the
Parkinson's patient i had last September
because she, too, was damaged,
but so very beautiful.

i used to fall asleep alone but
she grew tired
and began to fall asleep
between my fingertips while
i lay, left there wondering how
she managed to slip away
so quickly and she's not the
same now but she
will always
be beautiful.

predestined

it was still the beginning.

alcoholic breath ran across train tracks, then back, stopped in the middle and whispered, "i'm not moving." wind carried empty threats, but hearts beat faster as the call came closer. i ran inside. i grabbed a knife and crimson tides flowed into the crease of my elbow and created a pool of lost words.

that was just the beginning.

there was the time they danced on pattered rooftops.

strawberry screams and carbonated chuckles, headlights increasingly more blurred as the clock crept. my dress was too short and the fruit punch fishbowl was too expensive. i may have been the only one sober that night, but he still took my hand, waved his finger, and led me home as if i had been the one dancing too close to the edge with my eyes closed. i could have slipped as if rain had fallen a boozy rush into my cup, which remained empty like the look in his eyes that night.

i regress to the first night.

we may have been sober enough to sit crosswise as four a.m. warned us that the sun would soon silence the admissions we made over hours prior. when he reached for my hand, i wanted to pull back. he curled his fingertips over mine and i wanted to fall out of my skin and leave behind only the pieces of me that were left unbroken, but i didn't. he slept on the living room floor and when i closed my bedroom door behind me, i exhaled the realization that he had not tried to touch me, like the others, but instead he told me the story of how his life echoed the one i lived and maybe that's the reason i invited him back again.

there are still the intimacy issues.

he touched me now and my skin burned like holes made by acid. my eyes refused to surrender the light and my mind traced convoluted curves in place of my fingertips. as clothes hit the floor, i closed my thighs and remembered the times it wasn't up to me.

four a.m. reminds me that it is my fault for repressing the truth for four years, and the faults that i find are in everyone else but myself. i found the words, but the pool was too deep to climb out of. only one of us could float, while the other drowned blush wine as he sunk the lost cause down to the bottom with him.

pt. 2

when i was seventeen, we dressed up as pop punk idols and drank PBR on Halloween.

my best friend never cried, but she cried that night when i told her that i didn't like food anymore, that i, too often, took two orange pills before bed, and that i wore long sleeves because i hated attention, but hurting myself seemed like a good thing to do at the time.

the room stopped spinning only long enough for me to find the sink and spill the contents of my stomach faster than the secrets i kept for months saved for a night no one would remember.

we don't talk anymore, but i wonder if she knows how she saved me that night.

even if it were the cheap beer that made her cry, it might have been the first time i felt like someone ever heard me.

pt. 3

she was there the night i've refused to remember.

she left before he put his hands on me a different way than he had before.

i was eighteen and i still hadn't learned that alcohol makes you forget only the things unspeakable, or that lips that sip honeyed vodka sweet talk their way down thighs too tired to close, but that hands take over when realization becomes refusal and they push hip bones into the ground so hard that asphalt leaves scars down backs and shoulder blades bleed until sirens shine light on the situation

then legs and feet run.

i remember being in a parking lot with no clothes on and one eye open to prevent double vision from not allowing me to read the signs in order to discover my location.

my ex-boyfriend found me and he cried, but i didn't know why.

i lost my nose ring so i shoved my earring through the hole so that it wouldn't close up.

i still didn't have clothes on, but my nose ring was missing and i couldn't see the blood on my back, but maybe if i could i would have thought i fell because i'm clumsy and no one could have hurt me because i was there alone.

no, officer, he didn't rape me.

i'm not drunk.

he's my boyfriend.

i'm fine.

where is my nose ring?

hide and seek

maybe he doesn't notice he does it, but when he stops to think between bursts of nonsensical dramatics, he places the tip of his tongue ever so slightly between his top and bottom front teeth

bites down just a little

he grins without moving his lips

his eyes a look of longing and says, "i would have sex with you right here on this table if you asked me to," and i know he would too so i cross my legs and try not to show that my body has already started to move closer as my tongue traces the path i've been secretly watching his move.

he doesn't know what he does to me, so i try to explain but he doesn't want to know either so i stop and begin to collect the pieces of my broken story to put away in that box i've had hidden and sealed and if no lie hurts more it's the one that's etched on the rusted ring that sits inside because love doesn't conquer all when love isn't mutual and love isn't just attraction so love doesn't exist.

or does it?

to say it nicely, friends don't fuck.

and if they did they would fuck hard enough to pretend their subsequent absent breath is due to the fact that it's "been a while," but they most likely won't stop because why fuck someone else when their bodies decide to only let go with each other and their orgasms come as freely as either could choose to dress themselves and walk out of the room before they say something they'll regret when the reality outside the bedroom comes rushing through the closed door, but they don't.

that's why i said no in the first place.

love doesn't allow for games but i played hide and seek when i was too young to realize that the kind of love i felt was the kind you weren't supposed to feel until later when time and money allowed, so i hid that love and stopped searching once i realized the game wasn't over because sometimes people grow up and sometimes they don't so i'll let you keep playing while i watch from behind glass doors.

millennials

we look for solace at the bottom of empty bottles and burning embers
when no one remembers
traditional tattoos in early December and
family members, uncorked, unwrapped, misunderstood—
glowing cinders and firewood.
family went from great to good to “we probably should”
it’s fucking snowing
well, better get going

we may be undergoing a transformation
a liquid renovation
an opaque smoky alteration
every single substance temptation
just to look for preservation
some sort of correlation between a broken home
and the inability to be alone.

we look for lovers to find constancy where instability holds precedence
or we don’t look for lovers if independence is our current preference and
conquering fears includes overcoming the mere presence of someone
with the potential to leave us breathless
it’s all senseless
looking for anything at all is basically a death wish
let it find you and let it stitch the open wounds and
kiss the risen scars across your arms and on your heart
whether it be fingertips, brush tips, or paint drips
down your bodily work of art
create beauty from the start
instead of getting lost in the dark.

pt. 5

bumpin' frat houses became therapists' couches faster than the drunken decision to smoke that coke-filled-blunt but that was one of those defining moments in my life and i knew i had choices to make and five couches later i tried, but telling the truth is hard when you don't even know what the truth is.

so, twenty years young i decided i had licked the bottle clean but i found out my slate wasn't as easy so instead of spending my time alone, i created quite a love affair with my bedroom, but even the bed grew tired of carrying my weight so i lost just about everything i had left.

august 21, 2010

they pump us with medication so we don't have to feel anymore
take these. twice a day. they'll help. don't forget to eat.
a questionnaire and forty-seven minutes later
a diagnosis, prescription, and three pamphlets
it. will. get. better.

but they left out the most important questions like:
did it hurt when he drug you across the asphalt-
did you cry when he left you there alone-
do you even remember it?

you know,
i don't.
but i do feel it

and i wondered,
is it so crazy to be sad-
after all, i didn't *enjoy* it.
i told them, let me feel
let me write it down before i swallow those pills
cause maybe they'll make me forget
and the only help i'll ever get
is from the misguided memories
forced into my head
along with that one date
i'll certainly never neglect.

lust

undress me

undress me with your words
lay me down between the stanzas of your secrets and your scars
let me lick your dark remarks
please fill me with poetic moans
and trace my convoluted curves
as your tongue tell narratives of its own
your breath leave broken sentences across my heavy chest
while you pull yourself into my hips
our story solely written by your molded mattress

and, baby, when you touch me
my skin will bleed through pages of your empty notebook
and i hope i fill it.

indian style

we could be sitting across from each other on the hardwood floor
indian style and barely touching but the tips of our knees
i would look into your eyes and think it was the most beautiful five minutes
i'd spent all day
the space between us would lay stagnant like water under a bridge post storm
and if you lean in
my breath may get caught in my chest as i inhale
if i don't drown—
my lips may move towards yours
i would taste you for the thousandth time and just like the first,
remember why you are the sweetest kiss i've ever encountered
we could talk about the meaning of life or sit in complete silence
and either way i would spend the rest of the night hitting

replay in my head
pause to watch you kiss me
stop to catch you undress me with your eyes
play while you undress me with your hands

i wonder how long this feeling lasts
i could tell you i love you two hundred times every day
and i would mean it if i told you that every time i said it
i meant it a little more than the last time
it must be the way you—
make the world laugh
make every kiss as good as if it was the last one
make every tear i've ever shed worth being broken over and over again to get to you

every time i tell you i love you—
i mean it more than the last time
you've got me writing
notes in my phone
poetry in my head
using words i've never said before
feeling emotions i've never fucking felt before

we could be sitting across from each other on the hardwood floor
indian style and barely touching
but the space between us would be electric
and if we didn't speak a word it would be okay.

playing with fire

[in the name of the Father,]

here in suburbia Pennsylvania,
most of the twenty somethings i know
grew up being told that if they didn't believe in God,
they would live an eternity in the burning flames of hell

little children
dressed in their catholic school jumpers
their hair in pigtails
their superhero action figures in the front pockets of their backpacks
went to school every morning
sat in religion class
and pictured their lifeless little souls
burning in the fiery flames of hell
with the black-eyed, red-horned devil laughing from above them
because they forgot to say their prayers before their recess snack

so they went to church every Sunday
they prayed to God every night before they fell asleep
they learned the words to all the hymns
they sang the songs with pride
they said grace before every meal
and they dreamed of going to heaven someday

because they were children
and they did what they were told
and they believed what they were told to believe
and mostly, because they were afraid

[and of the Son,]

we got to high school
where we started to realize that sinning
meant doing the things that felt most natural to us
we held hands in the hallways
gave goodnight kisses to our homecoming dates
we snuck out the back doors of our parents' houses
and made love under the stars to the ones we fell hard for
we forgot to say our prayers when we passed out at four in the morning
we didn't wake up for church on Sundays

we experienced the death of a former classmate
with tears in our eyes
we took timid steps towards the open casket
looked down upon the cold and lifeless skin of a friend taken too soon

he was gone with no life left to live
and it didn't matter what he had done on earth because he wasn't here now
he had lost his chance to live
so we began to live life for him

[and of the Holy Spirit,]

high school was over and life became a blurred whirlwind of emotional exhilaration
nights spent with strangers drinking from the same bottle
days spent taking road trips to imaginary places without telling your parents where you'd been
sin after sin after sin
making friends with all the people you had only been warned about in the "Playing With Fire"
section of your grade school religion textbook
waking up in a new bed in a new place with a new life
a life that you created yourself
in your mind,
sin becomes a beautiful expression of the person you are within
God develops into a fictional character like the plot of your life developed
from the one your parents drew on your chalkboard
to the one you painted yourself across brick walls in cities too small to hold the stories you now
have to be told

and although i would never admit this to anyone
sometimes, i find
in times of weakness and in times of fear
i hear a little voice in the back of my head telling me to say a prayer
so i think to myself,
"dear God, let me live to see another day."
because this life is way too beautiful to waste
and from the moment i learned what it meant to be fearful
sitting at that desk in my grade school classroom
wide eyed
malleable mind
it was only of God's power to take everything away

[amen.]

home

some days
our teacup hearts pour warm wishes into porcelain cups
while others,
our mallet hands slam broken words through wrinkled cotton shirts

on those days
barefoot toes creep louder across hardwood floors
and wooden doors
close space between my glassy eyes and her stifled cries

but words,
words hit harder than the back of her swinging hand
and words fill rock made crevices inside my cluttered chest
and moving back home has only made me come to detest
the grotesque sounds of

dogs barking and heels clicking
news anchors talking and dinner cooking
fireplaces crackling and forks scraping
mouths screaming and mothers crying

each day a part of the little girl inside my head is dying
throwing paper money into piles
post cards to foreign places where guitar strings snap nostalgia
into unaddressed envelopes that do not return home

and home,
home now sounds more like

beer cans cracking and fried food crackling
speakers blasting and boys laughing
cigarettes burning and cats purring
headboards squeaking and moaning pleading

some days storms pass
through rooms with red walls
and underneath midnight bed sheets
while others fall heavy anchors
to immaculate floors that break with the weight
of unsettled discrepancies and topics of debate

lately, late nights end in one of two ways—
praying for sleep to take me away from this foreign place,

or peacefully at home in bed with
the only reason i'm now saved.

remedy

we are a violent chemistry
falling leaves made from porcelain pottery
a crystal energy
painting violet hues of ecstasy across guarded enemies
shattering endlessly
scattered pieces across quilted colors breathlessly
dissipating telepathy
blindly reiterating a fuchsia fantasy
writing poetry to hold melody
as indigo waves crash heavily
come into me
pull out your weaponry and infuse your extremities incessantly into my identity
leave me in helpless expectancy
a war of intensity
like antipathy to serenity
you are my remedy

wanderlust

August sun burns red
heated highway signs and parallel yellow lines
a full tank of gas and we can go anywhere
one hundred and twenty miles
and Maryland holds our first stop
that car ride holds our first shared bass drop
one month and one hundred and twenty miles
and my entire world was flip-flopped
card games, cabanas, José Cuervo, and Nirvana
afternoon pools of thought
drowning in french kisses
interruptions
drunk admissions
you're the only key to my ignition

in October we sat on stained train seats
colors outside through dirty windows leaked
sleepy eyes and fingers tied
living freely between the city streets
champagne toasts, Brand New on repeat
red lipped kisses, skin to skin on white bed sheets
i drank you in
our stop—Penn Station
and the New York city lights
had never shined quite so bright

stops were made between August and October
on top of squeaky bed frames
orgasmic moans
and sleepy groans
i lay helpless, breathless
a prisoner to the pleas that left me restless
and the nights you spill your insides into your pillowcase
through hesitated breath
and cotton whispers holding depth
long pauses that could end your vulnerability at any second—
those are the nights
i want to melt between your fingertips
suffocate between your parted lips
scream “forever”
into the crevice between your collar bone and head
i want to scream profanities at the lingering doubts i have

i want to tell myself this one is different
but experience speaks louder than promises

where have you been?
where are you going next?

i often wonder
when you haven't had it all
maybe some isn't enough
maybe i'm just your next stop
but i hope to god that i'm your last.

21st century marriage

tears rolls down cheeks like raindrop races down windshields
rough nights turn to mornings without kisses
bedside notes replaced with silenced alarm clocks
ticking time cat whiskers tickle cold noses
tomorrow will be better
tomorrow
tomorrow
kitchen chairs unoccupied for months
take-out boxes thrown across coffee tables
soda rings and styrofoam cups with teeth marks
a worn couch, cat hair ridden, down feathers sticking out from pillows with saliva stains
the morning news replaced by afternoon replaced by evening replaced by
snoring soundtracks written within the fabric
dollar bills wedged between cushions
shoe prints line the arm replace the old pattern
an empty bed and an even emptier house
with broken vows and a new member arriving nine months from now
a broken home with broken windows
cracked mirrors and dirty laundry
framed pictures falling down
late work nights and early morning arrivals
drunk fights at two in the morning
wedding bands thrown across the room and left there
wedding bands engraved along the inside
“for better, for worse, forever.”

chemistry

i spend my nights
forming an indent in the shape of my body
on a mattress that isn't mine.

i lie next to something my most vivid dreams
could never have conjured on their own—
someone
so beautiful that
sometimes my body aches from the inside out.

i spend my nights
tracing the outline of his jaw
with the tips of my fingers.
i memorize every curve of his cheekbone,
each angle of the structure of his seamless existence,
and sometimes—
the moonlight hits just right,
a single beam, spread
across four pillows and
two bodies
separated by nothing more
than the skin stretched over their bones.

i spend my nights
dropping clothes to the floor
while suppressing soft screams.
he touches my skin and

chemistry never made sense to me before
but it sure as hell makes sense to me now
because when he touches my skin,
he becomes the sole catalyst
to the beat of my heart,
the force of deposition
behind each seduced, respired breath,
and the trickling condensation
along the arched curve of my back—

between french kisses,
soaking skin and getting
lost in green eyes and climax,

i spend my nights
blissfully sinking between
this bed, and
his moonlight.

here

this bed feels foreign
the place to my left is unoccupied
and the air i breathe is only mine
here, my eyes see the earliest hours of the morning
sleep only comes easy when i'm there
the space above my head is loud here
my mind becomes the clock with too much time on its hands

you are there
i am here
and i think,
if here were there
your fingertips would reach for mine
and set fire to my brain
extinguish here for only tonight
your lips to my skin breathe the nightmares from my bones
your heartbeat the lullaby to close my eyes
your body the blanket tightly tangled around mine

but when i wake up here
this room is still dark
without the symphony of syncopated exhalation
the silence is piercing
it's cold
and i wish i were there

lately

lately,
i spend my days
creating maps in the margins of my mind
charting roads that lead to cities far away from this one—
cities which tread water up towers that
don't crumble under the weight
the world showers upon them

lately,
i spend my nights
lying beneath hues of light,
lying between cracks
of bedframes—
crevices in skin,
lying to myself
imagining that the
world exists nowhere else
but here

lately i find myself holding on a little bit tighter,
grasping at the water that drains down your shower,
losing myself in its reflection.

enough

morning breath—
maple trees outside
your window
fresh bed sheets
like frost that
lines the pane
you lean into me
i let you in

mornings spent
breathing the scent
of your skin against
soiled bed sheets
worn like the
leather under the
soles of your feet
you bend into me
i let you in

mornings i breathe
promises into
parted lips
underneath your
bed sheets
you let me in
like antipathy
to serenity
you break into me
i let you in

and if the last
breath i take
is used to
tell you
how much
i've loved you,
it still
wouldn't be
enough

and i wonder

people always ask me,
“what are you going to do?”

and i wonder—

why the fuck does it matter to you
whether i write the president’s next speech
or whether i spread a map in front of me
close my eyes and point to a place
open my eyes and stumble
into cities i’ve never seen before
and fall in love with faces
that belong to strangers
marked by their own disgrace

and i wonder—

how different would life be
if instead people asked me,
“what are you doing?”

i would tell them,

most nights i fall asleep
to the sound of someone’s heartbeat
i lay my head on his chest,
press my lips to his skin,
and tell him
he’s the best “mistake” i’ve ever made

and

i write poetry to keep me sane

and

i apply to jobs i know i won’t take
but i go on interviews
like each new room
isn’t surrounded by the same four walls,
florescent lights, and
paychecks that don’t reflect
a Bachelor’s degree,
whatever that means

i've spent the past year
making up for my mistakes
writing the next chapter
of this story i create
and with open eyes and a clear mind
i find beauty in everything.

five years ago,
i let alcohol run through
my blood instead of water
i calculated self-worth by the number of men
who touched my skin

and

if someone had asked me then,
“what are you doing?”
i might have stopped—
but instead they laughed,
picked me up off the ground,
and said,
“let's do it again next weekend.”

sometimes i drive so fast
that when i get home
i wonder how my body
isn't wrapped around a
telephone pole
like a piece of chewed gum

i feel my heart in my chest—
take so many deep breaths
like air is all i have left

i wake up to overheard conversations
whispers through gritted teeth with
so much fucking sympathy

“she's not where she should be”
“where is she going to go next?”

and i wonder—

love

the devil and god are raging inside me

last Sunday,
i sat in the pew of a Roman Catholic church
and thought about fucking someone
i'd never even kissed before.

i've got the devil inside of me—
i've got a fire burning beneath my bones
and this unquenchable desire
to light him up.

forgive me father,
but i want to drink from the cup

i'm filled with sin
and if i were to let him touch me,
my skin would turn black ash
beneath the path his fingers trace

but he is temptation

the type that must taste
like milk and honey

the type that makes
sinning feel better than sex

yet i know

he was the white dove
in my dream that night—

and as quickly as he came,
he flew away.

to the one who's been keeping me up at night

you knew what you were doing
every time you twisted your tongue in my direction
and told me the things i waited to hear
over glasses of white wine
or throws at a dartboard

i spent so much time
waiting for you to ask what my favorite color is,
or what songs i put on when i'm feeling sad

i spent so much time hating the fact that
it seemed like you were so alive on the inside
while i was stuck dancing
on ceilings where no one could see me
or writing love poems on the back
of forgotten notepads

it's funny, i rarely don't get what i want—
which only made your poison taste sweeter
and when i wanted to look into your
stoned and half-shut eyes
it only made me try harder
to see inside your mind

and we could dance across train tracks
and sneak kisses with closed lips
underneath moonlight and cobwebs
while i still second-guess
every desire i've ever had

or we could dance with one eye open
until 5 o'clock am
in front of windows and city lights,
or even between couch cushions
if you'd like

i saw a side of you that night—
the one you hide away
and it was only for a second
but i get it
we're all scared of something, babe,
we just don't all let it destroy us

and i want you to know
that i couldn't wait for you to get out
of my car the next morning

the trail of smoke you left behind
was nothing compared to
the demons inside of you
that i know keep you up at night

but they'll be the only ones
because from now on,
i'll be asleep.

crossroads

we've been lying to ourselves—
trying to tell ourselves that
we don't have to listen to the
way our bodies move when
we feel something. i mean,
really
feel something.
and that—
we can just ignore the
moments our minds create
where we've found happiness
in a life dismantled by the
choices we've made, or
the people who have
cracked the skin
beneath our tired eyes.

it feels like sometimes we're
just walking in a circle
through the crossroads
of the life we've created,
ignoring the signs,
never stopping,
nor listening to what
our bodies are trying
to tell us—
even though they're
screaming.

but there's something about
the way these bodies move when
we feel something,

it's incredible.

and maybe that's the reason
we're all so numb.

we're driving down 95, going close to 95,
and everything smells like weed and Irish Spring

it's three o'clock in the morning and my lungs
are filled with smoke,
my eyelids are quarter moons, fluttering

i can't seem to remember my name,
but i notice just how right his fingers
fit in the spaces between mine

the city skyline is fading—
i am fading—
there's something about the silence
and the state of being half asleep
and half awake
in an unsafe space

and i wonder why being in the wrong
place at the right time
brings to life the dead bones
inside my body
and why it only took one kiss
for me to get used to
the taste of his lips and
why the car keeps driving forward
when all i want to do is go back
to the city and live in side streets
and dive bars forever

the silence in this car is so loud
that i cannot hear myself
think the words,
“i'm in love with the moment.”
but i can feel them rattling
underneath those
renewed bones inside my chest

and the entire person that i used to be
is fading.

1am: as she sleeps

she smells like rain when she's sad. and she seldom falls asleep before me, but it seems the days her fragile body can't take any more of being awake are those that i long to look into her eyes the most. but nothing is more beautiful than the way her chest falls up and down with each breath she takes. even on nights she wakes up shaking with nightmare, heaving with her heavy heart, she reminds me why i grew to love the days that rain the most— after she fell into my life.

when she is happy, we lie awake until our eyelids have to beg for rest until the morning. laughter is the soundtrack to our late night conversations. her skin is the silk i wrap around my body and her lips are coated in sugar. she smells like roses when she smiles. and lately she seldom smiles, but that's okay. i have grown to love the rain anyway.

anchor

you've shown him all the parts of yourself that no one else has seen before. the parts of you that you're too ashamed to admit once made up the main plot of your life and you find yourself waking up from the same nightmare every morning apologizing to yourself for being the protagonist of that story for so long.

now you wake up in the same bed each day. you spend each night drowning in green eyes that haven't seen the darker sides of life, which you spent years trying to find your way out of. you make love now. you lose your breath between inhaling his scent and looking right into his eyes while he puts himself inside you. you look right into his eyes and for the first time in your life it doesn't make you sick to your stomach to have someone else infuse themselves into the most delicate part of your existence. you look right into his eyes and you understand why music didn't move you before the way it does now. you understand why it took so many substances for you to feel substantial. you look into his eyes and you understand why you used to imagine an end to the life you lead because it hadn't really started yet.

you wake up every morning and pray the wind will sweep you into new cities, but this time, not because you want to run away. you live to see the sky on days where the sun and moon coincide even if it's only for a minute. you stop letting your past pull the anchor to the ship you had docked for so long. you let the water pull you instead towards the horizon where neither darkness, nor light inhibits your clear mind. finally, you've set sail and let yourself free.

withdrawal

every time i leave you, i come down
i sweat you out and shake you off
and the long road home is just an illusion

and my brain lies somewhere between
your mattress and the hole in your wall
it's in three different pieces—
one is melted into the floor,
another is screaming,
and the last is throbbing to the beat of your heart

the empty space residing inside my head
is the void that keeps me up at night
when i'm left with nothing but a
reel of half faded memories
fogged by the smoke you breathe from your lungs—
drowning in warm white wine

i want to tell you i'm fine,
but every shadow that knocks
around this empty skull
is just another reminder
that i've never felt more alone
than i do on the nights i spend with you
and in the mornings after

and each third of my brain is trapped
inside your bedroom—
and i'm coming down

eventually i will sink
right into your floorboards
and disintegrate.

untitled

she has the ability to allow herself to become completely consumed by the connections she makes with the people she loves, and by the vices she chooses to prevent her from lying in bed at night sober and alone with nothing but the ache inside her body that runs from the back of her skull down to the tips of her toes.

she has the capacity to love someone so much that she loses the parts of herself that have been consistent throughout her whole life—

she loses her strength
she loses her confidence
she loses her goddamn mind

piece
by
piece

and she scrambled to write it all down, underneath his pillow, or on the back of the hat hanging off the side of his bed, but her sentences didn't end when she walked out his front door. they ran miles ahead of her as she drove back to the place she calls home and crawled into the only space that keeps her safe.

it's almost impossible to accept that something is over when it never had the chance to begin. she remembers trains at midnight, city lights, and long kisses in front of strangers, but she also remembers the feeling of being worthless and that blank and empty stare behind his tired eyes.

if only it were as easy for her to forget as it was for him to paint the sky with misrepresentations of what he thought it meant to love someone.

skin

this morning
instead of lying awake
agonizing over thinking about
your lips and the adorable
way you avoid texting me back—
i decided to write a poem

and like usual,
four in the morning
came and went
and i realized that
leaving you would
be equivalent to
peeling off the top layer
of my skin

and that nothing you
can be addicted to in life
is ever positive

and that every poem
i try to write
is about
you anyway

getting to know you: through silence, city sidewalks, and smoke

my head is filled with city smog
and it is so cold that
i can see every word that does not fall
from my mouth, evaporate
in the space in front of me

and he doesn't hold my hand
but maybe if he did
i would melt all nineteen degrees of
Christmas night right into the sidewalk

Christmas night in Center City, Philadelphia
where every homeless body that
lay quiet against cement or
glass window
holds a place in the heart of the one
whose hand remains empty
and whose eyes are glue to the way his feet walk
and whose mouth is a stone cold contour
and whose step treads a little faster past
occupied blankets,
and inebriated screaming

and the silence between us is deafening as
he feels the chill that runs down their spines,
the empty sting inside the pit of their stomachs—
and the trauma

and all the words slammed between my lips
get caught instead inside my smog filled head
and all the lights shine a little brighter
and the sidewalk runs a little longer

but i'm too high to notice
that my mind becomes a one-track vinyl
replaying the words
"i love you"
in slow motion
on repeat

i love you
i love
you
i
love
you

because i can't stand the silence
and he looks so beautiful when
he feels something

and it's so fucking cold
but tonight i found a fire inside a city
whose walls were built to never be broken

i found it raging inside his chest—
a city full of stories
for another day

and just walking next to me
without even holding my hand,
or speaking a word—
he keeps me warm.

pieces

she's standing at the top of the stairs. she's waiting. and she lets her hair down as you walk towards her body. it falls past her cheeks, brushes against her collar bone, and her body opens up like the petals on roses. the petals on the roses in the glass vase up on your piano. her body is a glass vase. her skin is made entirely of glass and you are afraid that if you hold her too tightly, she'll shatter between your fingertips and drop between the cracks in the hardwood beneath your feet. her lips are rose petals. every kiss she drops against your skin leaves a blush impression in the shape of her mouth. she hasn't used her mouth to tell you she loves you. but the way her body moves against yours, the way her breath gets caught in her chest every time you look into her eyes, and the way she looks into your eyes— she's speaking to you in a language you've never heard before. she's telling you something.

she's standing at the top of the stairs and when you open up your arms, she breaks. she breaks into a million pieces. but when you bring her into bed and let her borrow what beats inside your chest, she blooms into a billion pieces. she hasn't told you that she loves you, but she breathes clouds of rain into your skin, so you can grow too, and her lips press petals into the bones inside your body so that they can be beautiful too. she extinguishes the fire behind her eyes so that she can't destroy you the way she's destroyed everything else her glass fingertips have ever brushed against. and when you turn the lights out and pull the blankets up around your bare bodies, she won't have to speak a word at all. you'll just feel it.

dissolving

you're dissolving
bit by bit
you're leaving
traces of your existence
in the people
and places
you pass on
a daily basis

your tears are watering
the trenches your
friends have dug
and they're pulling
their limbs
from under the
dirt—
dissolving

your arms are
growing shorter
each time
they extend

your words
are falling
from the
sides
of your
lips

pretty
soon
you
won't
exist.

nothing, nowhere

i have a packed suitcase sitting on my bedroom floor,
but i have nowhere to go
and it seems almost nostalgic—

my jaw is out of alignment from
grinding my teeth into an anxious pile of chalk

which i've swept beneath my tongue
until i can think of something to write with it

and i've been biting my tongue with what's left of my teeth
until i can find the right time to speak the words with it

and i'm trying to figure out why i'm always in such a rush
when nothing else is moving around me

or why my family has stopped calling me
even though i've stopped answering the phone

and sometimes i forget that anything else
exists beyond the four walls of this room

because for as fast as i tend run away from here,
i just run in circles— blowing dust across the

pictures i've etched on these walls and burying the
words fallen beneath the floorboards.

everyone but me

everyone around me is dying
and i'm having a hard time trying
to figure out which ones are worth saving
and which ones i'm willing to watch
waste away until they are nothing more
than the dirt beneath their fingernails

everyone around here cracks the ground
beneath their feet as they step out of bed
each morning, leaving behind
the space that keeps them safe

everyone around me would agree
their daily life is a sad song on repeat
and getting to work means
lifting the weight—
it means doing what they have to do
to live half the life they should be living

and getting fucked up means removing
themselves from reality—
means they are one step closer to dying—
means who really cares anyway? because
no one around here really cares about
anyone but themselves anymore
or about anything but getting
fucked up anymore

and everyone wants so badly to just live
that they would be willing to die trying.

so today i decided that everyone around me
has been pulling me into the ground
next to the graves they've been digging
for themselves

today i decided that i'm not ready to
let my skin turn black or
to let someone dying be the reason
that i stop breathing

because we are all going to die someday anyway
and i'm finding reasons to live just a little longer

everyone around me has dark circles around their eyes
and too much time left
to be so tired.

salmon

one time i painted the upstairs bathroom at my mom's house
salmon. it was so bright. and it was so ugly. we couldn't help
but laugh when we finished. we laughed for a really long time.

but i kept it that way. i guess it felt like i made it mine
and every morning when i turned on the light
the pink-orange walls smiled at me while i brushed my teeth

they warmed my skin when i got out of the shower on
chilly mornings. they dried the tears that ran down my
cheeks and locked away the laughs that left my lips.

when i moved out a couple years later i came to visit one
day and the bathroom walls were painted grey and my old
bedroom had a futon and a desk and a large azure area rug

but my new home wasn't a home. it smelled like an air freshener.
my roommate didn't like when i made noise after 10pm
or when i drank wine on weeknights. it was freezing cold.

my new home felt like the rest of the places i tried to call home—
i didn't fit inside, the drone of the ceiling fan didn't put me to sleep,
the rug wasn't soft enough and it was so dark in there.

when i moved back to my mom's again— my cat died the day before
i came back. i forgot which key opened the front door. i had to
move into my sister's old room because mine was an art studio now.

but my mom's cat sleeps on my bed sometimes. i bought a pink rug
for my bedroom floor and i hung a tapestry over my bed (my mom
thinks it makes the room look like a college dorm room).

there's a section above the molding on the wall behind the toilet in
my bathroom that they must have missed when they painted it grey.
it's still the ugliest color salmon i have ever seen in my life.

i'll probably paint my next bathroom the same color.

dissonance

she was just a half step to the left
simultaneously running through the days of
the week like each one of them was tomorrow

he ran too,
but through fields of yesterday's—
just as fast.

they ran with their eyes closed
holding hands on three days
holding fists on the others

they were building an empire out of bricks
that just about fit together,
but just quite didn't

so the walls crumbled as they ran—
backward. then forward.
then backward again,

—but they kept building anyway.

three steps to the left
she envied the sunrise
while she bathed in the moonlight

he lifted her towards the sun
even as she covered her eyes—
he kept lifting, even as he grew frail

and some days she flew
and others she fell
but they kept running, she kept reaching

and as years went by
the walls they built grew stronger
and the songs they sang got longer

she still sang to the moon
while he sang to the sun and
the tunes they hummed didn't quite match up

—but the sound they made was beautiful.