

Dirty Talk

Listen: even a lullaby can bleed.

—Osip Mandelstam

Say my name like the last bright syllable
of olive in a martini glass, your tongue

an eel deranged with moonlight
squiggling at the bottom of a gasoline-

dark sea. I've tested all the condoms,
filled them with champagne, imagined

a tiny house inside the reservoir tip
where unborn children catch fireflies in a wet field,

their fingers pulsing with light
every time we play Pull-Out Roulette

or the latex doesn't break, a choreography
of blackout and bioluminescence plagiarized

from an oyster's bristled sheen. Love, we are ancient
as the first people who learned to screw standing up

against a pine tree. Only your murmurs can staunch
the fissures inside me. Touch me like an assassin

strokes the steps of a church. Say my name
until I glow, engorged and radiant

as a tick boasting her blood-swollen
hunger without shame.

Self-Portrait as a Country Song

Every town needs a woman
with bottle cap teeth

who can crack a cold one
between her legs, letting the froth

spill out like low tide
at Virginia Beach, who doesn't

give a shit she's too old
for the musicians

sipping Allagash
at the Red Door Saloon

and cackles *I play the twat*
before hitching up her skirt

and twiddling the wet stretch
of cotton like limp strings

of a miniature guitar,
who sneers, *how'd you like*

the show, teetering off
into the late afternoon sun

to watch her daughter
walk home from school,

pulsing with the kind
of thick, viscous love

I can't bear to imagine
my mother felt for me,

the way I once watched
an addict feed her blonde daughter

french fries at Wendy's before
nodding off in the back of their car

but for that moment they were
the two happiest people

I'd ever seen. I want to know
how the girl felt, draping

a sweater over her mother's
shuddering, thin frame,

if she kept watch, or drifted
off into her own world

the way I learned to stop feeling,
leaning against a radiator

to siphon rusted music
between my legs.

But every town needs
a mother who makes a light show

of her grief, spinning around
the supermarket,

warbling at the top of her lungs
you are my sunshine,

who knows what it's like
to play the town fool,

guarding our sadness
like a locket under her tongue,

spilling its light when she cracks
open its rusty jaws to sing.



When You're 15 and the Hospital Pharmacist Hits on You While Filling Your Prescription for Plan B

Resist the urge to give him your phone number.
Tell him he looks good in white, because he does. Do not peel
back the gauze at the crease of your elbow. Do not look
at the small glint of blood, remembering
the first time a man pulled your tampon out with his teeth,
or the English teacher or the friend's father.
Tell the pharmacist, sorry, the phlebotomist already asked you out.
Tell him you said yes because he tapped your vein
like a fuse, humming to its fattest point, that he drew your blood
with a patience so inconsequential it hurt, and the white walls
stung while you waited together for the vials to fill,
dark and oxygenated. That afterwards you craved
a glass bottle of coke, winced when he took
the needle out of its socket. Tell him this and leave
the smooth jazz and the boxes of cough syrup and Tylenol
in the luminous rows, touching each one before you go.
When he winks, let it fizzle into ash. Tell him your blood
is so thick it would ravage his veins.