

Flood

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## Physics Poem

I think of my drinking like the first law  
of motion: def. *an object*  
*in motion will stay in motion*  
*unless acted upon by an external force.*  
A ball rolling someone traps  
with their foot. Theoretically,  
if I'm remembering correctly, on a flat surface,  
without friction, the ball rolls on forever.  
I don't say this often, but I used to want to be  
a doctor. I told one, in the hospital,  
with a banana bag in my arm.  
Anything peach still makes me gag.  
Sipping cheap flavored rum  
from the bottle, while the parents were upstairs.  
The more I drank, the better  
I felt—Didn't remember 'til recently,  
but sometime soon after that,  
I heard someone say, in a log cabin,  
drinking coffee, that once they started,  
there was no telling what would happen.  
I shrugged it off as coincidence and carried on  
like nothing had happened. This new information  
was useless, I'd never need it again.  
When the science got too hard: def. *I was too*  
*wasted to learn it*, I took film classes  
instead. They turned the lights off  
and showed movies. If I could remove  
the barriers myself, then, like the ball,  
I could continue ad infinitum.

## Newcomer

The upside-down cross tattooed on her thigh,  
tells me the God thing might  
be an issue. I cross the room, introduce myself.  
Her voice is high & childlike. It spins  
& fills the space like a vat of cotton candy, the color  
of a freshly healed scar. Her insides don't match

her outsides. She stands in a white line of porchlight.  
The cigarette at her side glides  
toward her lips, releases smoke  
to her throat & sheds the ash  
from its tip. As it falls beside her leg, I see  
that, to her, the cross is right side up.

## Hindsight

I was taller than the boys  
in my fifth-grade class and sprouted curves  
before other girls, who poked  
fun at my training bras. While everyone else  
grew up and filled out,  
I stayed about the same. Once scrutinized  
for my above-average size, I  
was picked on for being small.

I think I peaked at sixteen when  
I wore more makeup and weighed  
ten pounds less. That's when a boy  
eight years older told me to hold on  
and put his cock down my throat.  
And a teacher tried to fuck  
on the classroom floor. They risked  
everything for me. No one ever wants it

that bad anymore. I drank like there  
was no tomorrow, because I hoped  
it wouldn't come. Throughout my young  
adult life, this was the only way I had fun.  
Playing board games on the basement floor,  
drinking seltzer from a can, I feel like  
I'm back in my training bras, growing up  
too quickly for me to understand.

## My First Drink

It seemed like everyone else  
had been drunk before. Many had  
older brothers & sisters, or parents,  
who would buy them booze.  
They posed in photos with beer cans,  
red cups & tally marks branded  
on the back of their hands with  
black permanent marker. In geometry class,  
they traded names & addresses like party  
intelligence. I was always the first one  
done with my quiz. My time finally came  
on New Year's Eve when I was fifteen  
& my best friend's dad was out of town.  
I knew mom wouldn't approve; she hadn't  
had a drink in years. The advice she gave me was  
*don't do shots*. The boys brought half a bottle  
of clear liquor & my first thought was whether  
or not it would be enough for six of us. I poured  
two & took them like capfuls of medicine.  
We splayed a deck of cards in a circle on the floor  
& someone gave me a mixed drink. Two is  
you. I held it & I remember feeling warm. Three is  
me. Not flushed but that the room & the people in it  
were familiar & comforting. Seven is heaven.  
I never wanted it to end. Apparently,  
while my head was in the toilet  
I kept asking *why me?* Maybe because  
I was the only one of us that night.  
I knew, I think, deep down,  
or a part of me did.

## Manic Pixie Dream Girl

People have a bad habit  
of falling in love with me  
at bus stops, in taxi cabs,  
on motorcycles, in secret labs.  
It saved a lot of money  
when I was drinking and drugging.  
I'd quit months ago, but when  
I happened upon a half-empty  
pack of cigarettes, I smoked the rest  
because I hadn't bought them  
recently. I let a sad boy bum some  
after my home group. He had  
a few years, I hadn't hit one.  
We got coffee and he tried  
to kiss me. I said I wasn't ready,  
and he got angry. So, I watched as he walked out  
of meetings. Once my ex overdosed,  
I knew I couldn't save anyone,  
regardless of how much glitter, indie music, or  
Naloxone I threw at them.

To Mistresses

My mother wants me to know,  
at an early age, that a man will never leave  
his wife for me, no matter what

he says. I'm unsure whether or not  
my mustachioed DJ in Bushwick  
is still with his green card wife.

My father reads a poem of mine & says  
*this isn't poetry; it doesn't rhyme.*  
I never tell him about my condition.

When a woman warns me of a man  
whose poems are riddled with maudlin guilt,  
it only piques my interest, like the dope

I'd try if I went back out. If he were so  
pernicious, you wouldn't have suggested  
I contact someone his age. We meet for coffee

& fellowship, where everyone judges  
my youthful exuberance & exposed  
décolletage. He says *mouth*

like *moth*. You don't come up. He can't stop  
drinking me in from across the room,  
while toying with another young thing.

I look back as I leave, to make sure he's  
watching, though I know he will be.  
I ask how you two know each other. You say

*we had a long affair.* I ask about  
his penis. You say you can't remember.  
I search the back of his book for  
your name. It's beneath *family & friends.*



## Newcomer II

The book of poetry she gave me  
is buried on one of my shelves  
in a brown paper bag. A sad  
reminder of the long-legged girl  
who lent it to me at the Sunday afternoon  
women's group, before she went out  
of town. My texts have gone unreturned.  
I know she's squinting to stabilize her own  
misspelled messages, but I'm supposed  
to give it back. As I peruse the newspaper  
obits, I wonder whether the book  
would be better tossed or undisturbed.

## Dead Girls

I was ready for one of us to die  
because that would have made sense—

the drowning drunk or junkie  
grasping at a flimsy reed of rosary beads.

I wasn't prepared for it to be anyone  
else. I didn't know her, but I knew of her. I always

knew who the pretty ones were. Time moved slowly  
after they announced it. At a friend's house for lunch,

we couldn't eat, just sat quietly, for what felt  
like weeks, and I wished it had been me. I still feel guilty

for skipping the funeral. I prayed for her family,  
even if I didn't believe it, and less so now.

I know I'm not supposed to understand  
why I'm here when my faith was in substance

that tinted my lips blue; why girls die with tiny  
gold crosses hanging around their necks.

## Clubhouse

white orb light fixtures

drip from the wood-

paneled ceiling

like spilt beer

onto eggshell

painted cinderblocks

an oracle before

the window reflected

in a bulb

hanging        behind

their face an icon

of Byzantine mosaic

sprouting violets

from the ears

of another fellow

Anonymous

Windshield wipers scrape, too wary  
for the weather, against the glass  
like screeching chalk. Water droplets  
waltz in the traffic light's halo.

My sponsor takes a hand off the  
wheel and passes her phone to me.

The spider webbed screen reflects a  
photo of the man who sat in  
front of me last Thursday. When I  
pretended to scratch the inner  
corners of my eyes, and cried like  
a child at drop-off while she  
snuck me another white chip. The

*unfortunate reality*

is he'd whispered they would watch the  
sun set someday soon, but his grand-  
parents found him in the bath: no  
longer breathing, slightly bleeding,  
beside a needle. She reminds  
me it's like a snake's shed skin: A  
delicate, harrowing cast.

We arrive at the church and share  
a cigarette inside her car,  
smoke funneling into our lungs.

## The Raccoons

I went to toss the rest  
of my cigarette in the garbage.  
When I lifted the lid  
two raccoons stared up at me  
from inside the green bin—  
arms wrapped around one another,  
as if caught in the middle  
of some salacious act. They stood  
motionless in their  
bower. I sent a photo  
and you said *be careful*—  
like many times before  
—*you don't want*  
*to get rabies*. They scratched  
the slick plastic to ascend,  
arms clung to the other  
as they slid back, weighed down,  
until one surmounted  
the valley of trash, balancing  
on top, masked head held high,  
before scurrying away,  
leaving the other behind—  
like you, moving across the state.  
I hesitated toward the junk  
and tipped it over  
enough for it to poke  
a whiskered snout  
in my direction, let out  
another ungrateful hiss  
and disappear in a cotton ball  
absorbing grey matter.

Sarah

i won't think about what it  
would be like without you here  
because i've seen it before  
my knees bruised on the bathroom  
floor the walls closed in until  
they collapsed and i buried  
my brokenness in your cin-  
namon curls like hermit crab  
shells that helped me to find new  
rooms to love me how we would  
listen to music in your  
car smoking cigarettes we  
didn't know what to do with  
our mouths i won't think about  
what it would be like without  
you from who i learned how to  
believe i'd never have to

Ricochet

Your car wouldn't start. I offered to drive to Costco,  
where—I didn't know—you and she would go.

You sang along to each song  
I played. *I cried to Neil Young* you said  
*while I got loaded*. That must have been years before.

I took the long way, bumping down the back roads,  
through the traffic circle by the farm stand—  
closed, but they'd be selling pumpkins  
now—the loneliness in our voices entwined,  
a gordian knot, neither one could undo.

You paid for my dried mangoes,  
discussed the break up, and invited me inside to try  
the cherry tart you wouldn't finish by yourself.

We couldn't bang it open on the sterile kitchen countertops.

You just gave me a hug for my 9-month chip,  
and I pressed my lips into your shoulder  
but didn't grip the skin between my teeth.

## Cherry Pit

You smiled when I knocked  
the ceramic mug against  
my crooked-tooth, a fruitless attempt to  
exist inconspicuous. When the lights were off,  
almost imperceptible, we bumped  
teeth, and my taste buds craved  
the maraschino cherries  
I'd seen in your fridge. Before bed,  
I pulled my mouthguard out  
from under the pillow to protect  
me, chewing on empty.



## Cough

My parents fought  
about whether drinking  
hot or cold liquid was better  
for a sore throat. Cough syrup  
worked for me. When a cold  
cleared up, I still took it  
for the taste. They carded me  
at the drug store and said *I hope  
you feel better*. I downed  
two bottles and vomited red,  
fluorescent like the back  
of an open-late sign.

Piedmont 79

a toddler with silhouetted  
horses roaming across  
her dress watched me cry  
on the train home i sat so it  
felt like going backwards  
the sun shined in my eyes  
this morning reminded me  
it almost happened in october  
because i'd said *fuck you*  
when you tried to cut me off  
when you had been drinking  
all day i'll never know what you said  
after i started trying to stop  
we slept facing different directions  
maybe i should have called a cab right then  
and taken it three hours  
home from the station  
i drove to the food store  
and the trees had undressed  
around university mall or whatever  
you call it nowadays  
funny how the leaves know it's time  
to go even though it's still warm out

## Wilderness

Someone who knows everything about me  
feels like a stranger and someone I feel like I've known  
my whole life knows almost nothing.

Exploring a new person can be lonely  
like trying to retrace steps somewhere unfamiliar,  
but I like how you refer to your outdoor rehab

as *the wilderness*. I imagine you  
trudging through tundra, finding yourself  
sleeping inside a tent on the cold floor.

*When I went to the wilderness*. For so long,  
the days dragged on, feet through mud, and suddenly  
I began going to sleep wanting to wake up,

excited to talk to you. Your face  
coming into focus while the coffeemaker  
on the table beside the bed heats up.

I should give myself goosebumps more often

because you'll kiss me with your fevered lips  
and move the pillow from behind my head  
and pull the ribbon out of my hair  
and tie my wrists together in a bow  
like a ballerina's ankle and twirl me  
on my front I'll be more comfortable  
forgetting I've got a figure at all  
still watching my reflection in the dark  
screen the way I saw Alicia Silverstone  
with that yellow plaid skirt in *Clueless* the  
first time I wondered why I didn't look  
like perfection instead I'll ask you to  
finish off on my face so I can't see  
myself which I hate except when you call  
me baby which I love but makes me wish  
you'd carry me like an English bulldog  
the ones that are so ugly they're almost cute  
I melt when you squeeze my thigh with your thumb  
and pinky finger at the same time

it hurts

to both want and not want something  
so badly I'll say I love you so I can come  
up with a list of reasons you don't that are  
easier for me to believe than nothing  
to do with the size of the space between my fingers  
anything besides

the scope of the cosmos  
the color of kisses you left on my chest

Portrait of the Alcoholic with Relapse Fantasy  
after *Kaveh Akbar*

She thinks the others peddling across the street  
know everything about her, jaywalking toward

the music, carrying like the love-sick songs  
arranged by the boy atop a mountain.

Having slipped inside a dress, she wants to rip  
her skin off less, for the first time since

the voices on her phone started to sound  
unfamiliar. Someone winks. The room

blushes with candlelight, while  
glasses of red wine flip through her

head like a kinetoscope. She remembers  
what it's like to be charmed. No one

will contain her wildfire body  
tonight. She's not afraid to die

a third time. There's a rabbit's foot  
in her purse. The tiny white toes chase her.

## Flood

Today it is raining  
and someone vomited outside the 7 a.m.  
again, the topic was step two  
and I thought about putting milk  
in my coffee but I didn't

and I couldn't fill in the bubbles  
on my exam  
because my hands were shaking  
trying to figure out  
what happens when I leave here  
would you come

I've always wanted to live  
in New York people wear all black  
and ask me for directions  
but I don't know where to go  
I get lost in the town I'm from

I forgot my key  
and can never remember  
the spare I wonder where  
the moat out front is rushing to  
you'll be off work soon

how special it is  
and how lucky I am  
to be here right now  
grow up so fast  
have so much time