

Drift

The Lighthouse

It starts with the lighthouse:
cold and cloying. Duty and
desolation. My oath crusting
the brick as the salt does
the walls, base to lantern. Ever
watching, waiting, grating
on itself. Spiteful. Yet—
day by day—I spill my
liquid light into the ocean,
desperate.

Inside the clock ticks
morse code to the trees
tapping on the window and
water washes down
my back, leaving
an armor piece of
icicles in their wake.
It's time to
turn off the light,
but let me steal
another second
they're
short these days.

Every day I miss those damn sailors
more, hate them more, loath—
ignore me. Ghosts linger,
longing, in my lamp and
lumber under stairs. Maybe
it's me. (I don't quite recognize
myself anymore. Mirrors
serve other uses to me now).

The job was a
two week gig.

Then two months.
Then “Just a little bit more.”
(Just a little bit more).
And I am nothing but
diligent
to a fatal fault.
So I labor until
light might as well
be my language,
lacerating my tongue
as I talk away another’s
loneliness.
(Just a little bit more).
And, I know,
it’s the same wind
on the galley as on
the ground, but—
lately—I want to feel
the wind rushing
past my face
and the dirt
folding my body—
some kid’s
abandoned origami—
for flinging myself
over the safety rail.

The mums are covered
in snow, yet I still have to
endure the boil of your words.
It’s dried the whole goddamn turkey.
But I’ll still smile through the
stick filling my mouth. And,
as I pick the bones clean,
I have to dig the physics out my teeth:
viscosity and kinematics and calculus
crammed up to the gums. God,
why couldn’t I leave this behind.

“Appreciate—”

What? February has been
stuffed so far down my throat
snow drops from my ears and
circulates in my consciousness
until there's new precipitation—
Apologies, my snowglobe mentality
muddles my emotions and
I should be grateful of this
opportunity (Just a little bit more).
Yet, I itch to dive into the lamp.

We wear our hair
ridiculously long. Every
strand slick from
neglect. I can't afford
to let my hand stop
lingering on form and
knife. Eyes tracking slip stains.
Slicing, scraping,
seeing how my fingers
swivel. Reducing.
Maybe you broke me down
just like you do
every time, or maybe
you were really
right.
I don't know
with the rainbows and
snow. Showers. Buds
peeking, frost
creeping.
I can't be sure.

We create a perfect mirror
of then, standing on stones
once something more. I
don't know how I missed it.
I was far too occupied with the
downtrodden wind caressing my
mouth that I didn't taste the memory

of that day, an abandoned life ago.

I know this is the end,
but I mourned that back
in March. When a month rested
on the cusp of two eras. And here
we are tripping from
grad gowns to diplomas to
a night back at middle school
and when dawn breaks I'm
still awake and the rain is so
soft that it feels like the real end—
not the shot or the bookstore or
that room on Main Street—the real
End. And it's perfect.

I lie on the porch
(The Gallery),
think of the end
(Contract voided),
awake to watch ships
in the harbor then
through the canvas,
dipping my hands
among acrylic waves:
crashing,
cold.
Right.
I can feel
the ghost
of the water
Resurrecting.

The Ship

It starts with the ship,
teetering over the breach
of the next wave. Abandon
damned straight to hell.
I can't be sure there was
a Before. Crescent cuts,
stubbed fingers:

gone.

On the beach screaming
over the edge of darkness,
polaroid memory preventing
stars. Inhale the smoke,
exhale the burning and—
there, now you can breathe.

You bolster me when we're left
up to our own devices alone—
alone together, that's how it's been.
And I drive windows cracked, music
static —so I hear your shout at the
moment of impact—
returning with
sweet drinks shaken with laughter.
We drift closer as the days begin to
tug at our tank tops, and that's what
I'm afraid of. That pull away from
your laughter and tentative hugs.

Rocks ripping up my soles,
water weighing, and I'm
still going. Every crash—
car jerking back your sister
to your right your sister
to your right your sister—
only leaves you jolting
into the next.

Ready?

Wheel in hand I'm turning and
midsummer incandescence—
heavy piano rocking the stars—
too tight t-shirt cold prickling paralysis—

Where is this? When is this
now? It's just the spontaneity
of the sea. Not all journeys are meant
to be smooth everything's—

(I don't know anything anymore).
My love mingles with fear and my shower
is crossed with tears and I think
this is going well sweating though
stained jeans bouncing about unsure
of this wanted feeling and I still
find myself having to shove
my way in, but I feel refreshed
(free) even with the stale smell of
this irremovable mask and I
smile hard enough so that you can
feel it as we connect bathed
in sun set and rise, foggy from
new rooms. (I don't remember
summer clothes).

Autumn splitter, Hailey as
every version: taking,
greedy. She wants, craves,
tastes your turkish delight
spits her vomit into the cup
sucks on the glass of the bowl.
Hands shaking "Steady." "Good girl."

Leather jacket pulling. She's
a different girl —"Kiss her
Hailey! Kiss her!"
Head turn—
you squeeze her waist. All eyes
away. She doesn't like how all this

feels.

Tumbling. Flipping. The wood
sopping wet beneath my feet.
Where'd I put the wheel?
Last year?! No that can't be...
First mate, to the helm! You!
Starboard! I'm not about to
lose the ship—

Everything fits together —a near
perfect puzzle—as we clash
as magnets, repelling
and joining. Sporadic. Intense.
So full that I feel my heart
may burst. Even in this cold
your love cooks me from inside
out and books fill my days
while I stretch and spin my nights
just to curl up on that
rough couch
where you no longer tuck—

I cough up flower petals.
No air left. Sobbing. Golden.
Leaning—"I can change
I swear"—Cobblestone then
your voice. Cobblestone.
A hiccup. A choke. A cough.
Oh, there's the wheel let me
give it a good
Spin.

Soaked to the spine in sweat
(I couldn't get enough of the
heat now I can't stand these waves)
My hand is ever inching toward
yours that I don't even notice him
walking out the door. Isolation
has come for me at last to

claim that contract I left.

This isn't right maybe I'll spin
again—

There is an ease to which we
entangle. Distance is finite
when you are forged in electric fire.
Years roll over my tongue, sit
behind my teeth, and all evaporate
when I talk to you. It's freezing, but
I've never felt warmer in that
goddamn room. Someone must have
finally fixed the heater right in
time for my own migration.

Warm and clean, I can
smell the detergent on
me—dripping—as we talk
late. You and me and you
deep sleep and waking,
bringing my polished hands
fumbling into yours.

Soft and serrated
sunset so bittersweet
as back pains form the seat
of this short avenue ride.
No one neglected I'm a bit
frantic.

God, I can't go back to
the Lighthouse I can't I just—

Coal soles I skitter across
the patio to crimped grass.
The air inside is cold but
heavy. I'm holding everything
in my head (split it open like
a melon I'm sure you'll find
the insults packed in,

seedy)

I waste my days
wasted come back in uniform
hoping this minor decision
blows over.

S p i n...

Holding hands in the rain and
on late night buses back. Home.
Daffodils crowd my senses as
you draw me into yourself—Spring
Herself—bringing in new days,
new beginnings in small rooms that
have never felt quite as b i g.

Summer escapades to
Burlington consuming
food and friends:
Bibimbap, Korean
Corndogs, your music
bouncing my car over
speed bumps cradling
our catchup con-
versations, chocolate
cake crumbling on my
tongue as fingers per-
use pictures to show
you. Green tea was
yesterday and sugar
cookies were rainy
today hiding amongst
the selves with your
impatience shining until
we're at Red Robin's
eating bottomless fries
to break wallowing sighs
and I ask for another
glass of milk (you're
obliging then, I don't
know what changed
between swapping stories

and next semester).

Round is how it feels on
my tongue and it tastes
as white as the
countertops: a place I'll
never return to—

There's so many
Memories piled on the
Wheel I worry—

Granite shatters
fractals from the
fracture slipping
between sinew and skin
bowls and white cupboards
fold and suck me in while
laughter languishes in the
air while I am sucked—

My hands mime a wheel
due to absent minded
compensation.

The boat has hunched in on
itself for lack of crew and
one sail is now where there were
three—how can this be?

Waves loom as monuments
to ephemerality.

I stagger to the rudder
but what I grasp is—

A box of Apples to Apples,
on the drunk cusp of sleep,
a girl's night splayed out
around me. This floor would be

A confidant to my declarations
of love spoken in seven tongues.

Here I can cradle your gaze in my
eyes while I can carve off a pretty
piece of my mind for you to eat.

Apples to Apples flops and
slouches in my hand until
I'm holding a pool noodle to
beat you with. My mouth turns
salty with cheery tears as we
dance on a newly made bed of
musty sheets, singing to each other
and dozing off to shadow puppet
sleep. Reality running on the heat of our
night, our hot breath mellowing
into cool morning air to breathe.

Condensation prickles in my
right hand. My water bottle,
bare, replacing the rudder yet
reminiscent of what it might
be (think harder, Hailey, get
yourself back on that boat)
“You can only blame yourself
for your friends not inviting you.”
I look over sweaty see her from
six years prior though only
box dye has changed her.
“You don't make an effort to see
them.”

I'm still holding the water bottle
but I watch the dashboard tear
itself up and the floor tidy before
becoming stained again and
glasses snap around her head as
she tilts a confused look at me and
her hair is dark as a thunderstorm.
“Have you even tried reaching out?
You're just giving up again.”
The rattle skips off and on in the
backseat as I tumble through thought:
texts without replies crying on tiled
floors as I see how far your deceit
bleeds into every communication

I made these past few months, but
it's still my fault.

The car jumps, buckles, I whirl,
shuffle away seeing you're
not in the seat and we're not
under fiery trees but a whole
galaxy. The rumble in the
backseat gets louder as wheels
drop into infinity and I become
a fireball along with the hunk of
metal I'm trapped in. I'm feeling
uncharacteristically
claustrophobic.

Spin. Spin. Spin.

Except now it's me
who's spinning the
height of my hair
careening above me.
And the hands on my
waist squeeze tighter
than my whale corpse
corset as he asks me
to "Breathe out"
I can't draw enough air
 "Keep breathing out"
It's what these macaroni
men order as they
pass me round and round
until my head bashes on
a chess board floor and stars—

Explode around me as I
crackle, frigid, miss orbit
soaring so far that I further
my contradiction, wondering
not if the fire will win or the
ice, but when.

When.

My dust tail blurs until it's
the powder on my wig until
it's the sand on the wind
migrating under the cool
breath of the moon. The
deep blue sky welcome
to creatures and condensation
but soon day will creep and
I will stay with scant sweat
abandoned by animals
above when they are under.
Just stay with me, please. Stay.

I clatter onto the deck
a peg loosened from the
rudder, utterly destroyed.
My true body keeled
over what's left of the stern.
Detached it's hard to watch
each sob echo through
my own body;
I don't recognize it
and so I slip into accidental
empathy, but then lightning
splits down the helm and
I ricochet sparking and
floating and—

I am above our fire.
crystalline and colorful
as we toss cheap color—
changing powder reducing us
to a cacophony of oh's and ah's.
I drift among the smoke rings
my father makes and, if only
sparks could sink. To be back
on that stick.

To be back.

To sink.

I've done it this time,
strayed too far away to
days wholly unattainable.
The boards crumble and
pluralized hands bumble
 (I don't think my body
 remembers itself anymore).

Water envelops me and
cold seeps through my pores
so icy quick I bite the bends
rush to the surface and—
The storm is gone,
the yoke of the sun fries on
the sky where a thousand people
bob with me. They swim with
sun-kissed skin, hands gentle
as sunbeams as they push me
under the orange oscillation of
the ocean, until the martian sky
fades and the sunset orders to:
 "Exhale all air."

I batter and blubber
against the lather of foam,
then on that souring salt
flooding through nose and mouth,
morphing to fire as I gag on:
 bubbles endless bubbles.
Tears only tantalize
the sea, and they
seep easy into the frothy
freeze, and my fiery
eyes can only see: bubbles
 endless bubbles. A carbonated
catastrophe for sodium deficient
freaks, a misremembered ramen
recipe that I should've remembered.

I should've remembered.

It was for you.

“Drift.”

I break the surface and surge
forward all sloppy strokes.
My hands pushing and
pulling
away, willing the change: a
seagull, a squid, a life vest, a
float, a boat, a something.
Something, something, something.
Cause the people pinch with fingers
like crab claws and they pull like
an undertow so far from the shore
and I can see their siren teeth
gleam. Submarine phantoms of the deep.

“Drift.”

Sixteen on the coast of the Cape
and my shorts ride up my ass
from too much ice cream
and I watch every wave pound
the shore even though the storm
has passed. And
that's what the voice sounds like.

“Drift.”

It's that feeling when winter
comes and there are so many
stars and so little room for
breath and the moon weighs
upon your chest pleasantly
and in that moment there would
be nothing better than eternity
holding its gaze in your eyes,
your chest,
your mouth.

“Drift.”

It's my Nana's tea just strong
enough to really taste but just
sweet enough to bring me back
every sip, but she won't negotiate
on the milk —it's “paper-bag”—
and when you're small its
okay for tea to be sweet.

When you're four you don't think
about how much they've compromised

For you.

I'm halfway to the grave, three feet
deep in the water the swish of fish
tails on my face as I come to:
lungs flat, body bloating.
I claw my way to the surface
to find an island not too far
(my eyes are all blue) and I
can only hope that it possesses
one of the fantastical memories
that propels me where friends
aren't ghosts, and family
fits easy, and I am so drunk
on happiness I don't hate myself
all the way. So I swim.

I have never known stagnance.

I will never know stagnance.

I will swim.

I won't let myself—

“Drift.”

God, leave me alone don't you see me
pulling at the seams indistinguishable from
dream as I navigate this overgrown stream
I know I'm too weak and my arms bend weird
and I worry for my legs letting blood
just let me get to the island and live

another golden time and forget and forget and
forget that it's all gone while I'm
Here and let me swim before you let me
Drift and put me down at the sunset before you make me
Drift and for the love of God—

“Hailey, that's enough.”

The Ocean

Hailey.

Stop.

Why stop when I can still grip the wheel in spite of sirens and sharks and scaled critters
chewing on my legs until they're nothing my seafoam though their feast was in vain as
I have battered them to no more than bits no don't come close I am in control and everything
will be totally wholly and completely fine if you just let me spin the wheel one more time
or maybe if you allowed me to do it thrice or five more times for I promise I can make it work.

Your tongue bleeds rubies and
your hands bracket stars and
you remember a million sunsets, but,
oh, Hailey, no one can live like this—

You don't understand;
if I don't sail I will sink
if I don't swim I will drown
and when I finally stop I will—

Drift, dear girl.
You will drift
and you will bob
and float and,
maybe, you will
sink, but
I promise you,
the tides will
cradle you if
you only let—

When have the tides ever protected me?
I've been it plaything for what feels like centuries
and how happy I will be to sweep my hand across this board
of a world cackling as I finally take Time and peel off the dainty swirl of its
shell until its juicy skin is just as raw as my own and oh how I'll make it pay for
every moment it has pilfered feigning it feral naivete and every person it beguiled behind my
back being momentarily enraptured and how I'll shove my love down their sticky throats myself.

Oh darling, I know
your grip has been
shaped for swords and
your tongue violent
words, but I see how
gently you once let
your thumb trace
times's whorls as
you explored all its
grooves...

Hailey.
What are you doing?

I am swimming.
It is all that I know
aside from sailing and
I have done my time
helpless so I will be subject
to no tides or time or world ever
again.

If you do not drift,
you will drown.
I am telling you now:
the world will not be
stagnant if you surrender,
nor will you be bashed
upon the coral, rotting,
nor will you forget.

...

Do you want to forget?
Your fingers are banded
with this multitude of
memories, so the skin is
stretched thin as violet
petals. And, oh, how it
resembles that color too.

...

I have been living
as if the world has been
ending for three years now.
And I never learned how to live
without loving too much, holding
too hard and I don't really know how
to stop myself. Maybe it would be better to
forget, even though it terrifies me, it hurts more
to go through these near constant changes. The losing and
the winning and the losing all over. One coming right after the
other right as I settle myself. And every person I love, I lose, and all these moments
slip so easily. How do I deal with the Leaving? The Drift? How am I supposed to let it all go?

That's just life.
The tides rise and fall
and the moon pushes and pulls.
And forgetting would make change
all the more worse. An unbruised body is
weak and waves unforgiving. I wish there was a way
for you to keep all those pretty jewels you carry, but advice
is the only thing I can offer to you: let your words mingle with
the surf and if they echo back in the crash maybe it was meant to
be, but sometimes you'll never hear those words again. And it will hurt. But it eases.

I have to
ask: is it me?
Cause I keep racking
my brain as to why it's so—

It is
you, holding
onto the past you
are inert to the future.
But it isn't all too bad to
look, you just need to Drift.

I
try to
Drift—

No,
you linger
on what you please
and sap your soul of
now with then and you
skip, and you can't keep
skipping what you don't like,
but neither should you tether yourself
in place. It is why you must learn to Drift.

Is Drift
not a lost friend?
Is it not a bottle at sea
its author anonymity and its
destination nowhere from equator
to prime meridian? Is it not the snow that
covers a toy that will never be seen? Is it not
the growing space between you and me as we speak?

It's
tasting
ice cream
and remembering
all twenty summers
of your existence tasting it
and eating more just to affirm
that you will eat it for twenty more,
thinking about all the ways you have had it
and then feeling it drip down your hand and going
back for a lick and eat it, truly eating it, for your twentieth time, thinking
about your twentieth time. Only thinking about your twentieth time.

I am
just so
worried
I'll forget
because I have
already erased so much.
Everything during my time
at the Lighthouse and now some of
what came before. I worry when I took
my eraser the strokes were far too broad and
long. Why not take every moment to remember
every moment as it slips away and why not stick fast
to every memory even as it becomes twilight, even as it
passes into a realm where I can't go. Why not try to hold on.

Your
forgetting
was manufactured
and now you treat your
memories the same way. For
trying to preserve you're losing
what it once was. Fossilization eventually
destroys what had been there until there it is
nothing of what it once was. I come across these
little gifts of nature often, but not even a ghost could cling to those rocks.

So then,
What do I do
to Drift and remember?

You
look then you
Drift, simple as
that. Follow the pull
and the resulting push back
to where you were and, most importantly,
you live, Hailey, cause you're not living now.
There may be a steady permanence in the past, but
it can be a glue trap for a small pirate like you.

Show me,
show me how
to Drift as others do.

Will you
promise to
let go of your
Loot and surrender
to tide as it guides you through
memory? To follow the whispers to
the trenches of the deep and return to seafoam shores?
Do you promise to caress coral and rock and wave? Though,
mostly, do you promise me without any doubt that you will not resist?

I
promise
not to shift
to stay in form
and Drift. And stay in
your domain in perpetual
change, if only you let me.

It's
up to you,
if you Drift.
I cannot stop
where you go but
I promise you the pain
will never be greater than
anchorage. I promise you that...

The Debris

How eager the ship

Diverges from the lighthouse

Both end in debris

Both end in debris

After crashing on the rocks

Time buckling form

Time buckling form

The tides cradled me instead

Babe of the ocean

Babe of the ocean

Salt sustains my lungs below

I walk by floating

I walk by floating

To and fro and fro and to

No destination

No destination

I greet ship and nautilus

Listen to whale song

Listen to whale song

To driftwood creak and shrimp snore

Listen don't remain

Listen don't remain

It's the beggars game you'll see

His ship is breaking

His ship is breaking

A pirate of memory

It's not greed but love

It's not greed but love

But love shouldn't weigh a thing

Yet the ship creaks so
How the ship creaks, so
Love the sea not your treasure
For it will drown you
It will drown you sir
I'm no siren of the sea
I know memory
I know memory
It can be a poison love
Drift with me instead
Drift with me instead
You may still see your treasure
May touch your treasure
Touch your treasure but
Leave it where it has sunken
Don't let it break you
Don't let it break you
Don't fight friendly tides my friend
Be debris with me
Be debris with me
See wonders weightless beneath
Don't become stagnant
Don't become stagnant
Such things are not meant for the sea
Sailor live with me
Sailor live with me
Don't become stagnant
Be debris with me
Don't let it break you
Touch your treasure but

Drift with me instead

I know memory

It will drown you sir

How the ship creaks so

It's not greed but love

Your ship is breaking

Listen don't remain

Listen to whale song

No destination

Now walk by floating

Babe of the ocean

Time buckling form

End in debris.

Now listen to me

Drift with me and see just how

Happy you can be.