

## Vanishing, & Other Inconsistencies

—*The life of a body is a nightmare.* —Richard Siken, “Portrait of Fryderyk in Shifting Light”

It is difficult to find  
the beginning  
of addiction:

I remember  
the Christmas  
I was fourteen  
(& still hadn’t bled).  
My mother  
overcooked the turkey  
—or maybe she didn’t.  
Maybe it was only  
that she almost passed  
out while my younger  
brother & I unwrapped  
presents, dumped out  
our stockings.

I found toy cars in mine.  
He found a box  
of tampons in his.

\*

I have a calculated  
memory of visiting  
the equator line  
outside of Quito, Ecuador.  
Calculated, because  
humans naturally alter  
memories each time  
we visit them.  
A red shirt becomes  
blue, a river freezes  
over & cracks. A mother  
is a mother & then  
she isn't. I try not  
to visit this memory  
frequently:

A tour guide gathered  
our group in front of a kitchen  
sink he said was positioned  
directly over the equator line.

His voice was papery  
& he released words  
like winged fortunes  
as he stood on one side  
of the sink & dumped  
a bucket of water in.

*See the way it spirals?  
Pay attention to the direction.*

He shuffled  
to the other side  
& dumped in  
another bucket.

*See! Look how the water  
spins the other way. Just look  
at it go! In circles!*

I still don't know  
if I believe him, or  
the water, or the equator.  
Whether it was the angle,

the tilt of his hands  
as he thrust the bucket,  
whether it was gravity  
staying true  
to what she knows,  
or the Earth,  
predictable  
& gorgeously parallel—

what makes anything spiral  
& disappear like that?

\*

There are days  
of vast disorder:  
I enter grief  
like a hammer

among a room of broken  
snow globes;

other days I am  
gentle enough to  
unstitch a whisper  
from a blanket

of stars with a single  
tooth.

I have nothing  
to disprove;

I too am only a self  
of blown glass  
& there is no ocean

surging within  
my ribbed grotto.

\*

Ten years since  
that Christmas—  
addiction, a frayed  
red thread knotting  
them together.

I once briefly tried  
counselling in hope  
of releasing my mother,  
her ribcage of twigs  
& splintered bone:  
a mirror of my possible  
future. The anxiety in me,  
a dark shadow cast  
over half of my every cell.

Session #1:

Shelves of books  
on cognitive  
behavioral therapy,  
addictions, eating  
disorders, depression,  
anxiety, anxiety, anxiety—

a wall of windows:  
thick strips of light  
shifted through the blinds  
& darkness lost  
another argument  
because of its refusal  
to surrender its warped  
body to logic or reason.

The counsellor leaned  
forward. In his hands:  
a purple form, a checklist  
of questions,

*yes or no*

answers.

*Have you ever*

*attempted suicide?* He asked.

No, I thought.

(Yes.

But I'd decided against  
giving the occurrence  
a name. The night  
I tried I'd drank two  
bottles of merlot,  
each with wild antelope  
striking the ground  
of their labels,

their slender legs  
extended as though  
they'd just leapt  
from a burnt sienna.

See,  
I was already weightless.)

\*

Most mornings, I rise  
like steam from a river

yielding winter—

make coffee, & return  
from the kitchen  
to find my corpse still  
curled on the mattress.

Shards of light  
cut through the blinds, rest

against her chest—  
a scalpel beginning  
an autopsy—

but this morning,

I forget to look. I sit  
by the window & try  
to name my faint  
reflection

in the glass.  
What to call something  
without a mouth?

An almost, its name  
should be monosyllabic  
—one flick  
    & it's off the tongue.

It looks at me as if  
its breath would love  
nothing more than to steal  
inside of me.

My hands stained  
with dark consent,  
I press my finger where  
the mute lunatic's

lips should be—

\*

What do we lose  
in echo?

Even astrologers  
are making excuses  
for the way Mercury spins  
in her web of stars.

Where sound does not  
exist, night may strike  
me as hard

as it likes. By asking  
his name, I couldn't deny  
wanting to know F.

To know him, then,  
was to also name his family,  
friends.

It went on like this.

I realized I wanted  
to name the world.

One night, a thick sheet  
of snow slid off the tin roof,  
almost buried me.

Afterwards, I thought  
of how F died—

he, who galloped  
through adolescence  
while I groped  
& stuttered. He,  
who taught me  
how to swear,  
& then  
what the words  
actually meant,  
& then  
how they felt



in a body.

After that small roof  
avalanche, I asked  
F's ghost, his body  
of absence  
if hope always curdles,

inevitably

into thick devastation.

The galaxies tilted  
ever so slightly—  
no response.

I waited to fall.

\*

My mother & F  
share a single  
similarity:

both are binary—  
one half glazed  
in shadow  
& the other  
just air.

You can love  
an addict  
or a ghost

if you're willing  
to be pulled  
between worlds  
created for  
a pulse so faint  
its very existence  
could be pure illusion.

\*

Session #2:

The counsellor said  
*Describe this house,*  
the structure in my mind  
I'd built entirely  
from the materials  
of fear:

beds stacked  
with wool blankets  
used to wrap the dead  
who haven't yet died,  
& the cupboards  
full of pottery cups  
with rims that shatter  
when raised to your lips.  
Bathtubs rimmed with  
many drains—so they  
can only hold a few  
inches of water  
at a time.

& what lives there:

A golden retriever  
who, twice a year,  
miscarries entire litters  
behind the couch.

A mother who,  
night after night,  
tries to microwave  
mint chocolate chip  
ice cream, leaves  
the stove element  
gleaming red,  
& eventually  
passes out face-  
down & naked  
on her bedroom floor.

*How long have you been  
this way?* the counsellor asked.

\*

F, teach me  
to leave  
this light so quietly.

This morning, watching  
the rain start—

you named me:  
(lonely)  
(selfish)  
(willing)

Minutes ago,  
the crocuses opened  
their shallow mouths

to us—

now they're soaked  
& closed,

refusing the sky  
even as we love them.

The hour curls  
in thunder;  
it adores the taste  
of your name  
in its mouth.

\*

Session #3:

I told the counsellor  
*I'm afraid* to take  
medication.

I have an *addictive*  
*personality*—

what dwells in me  
has also wrapped  
its long bony fingers  
around my mother's throat  
a thousand times over

& let go each time  
at the very end  
of the last exhale  
her body of burnt  
moths & crushed  
truths could release.

\*

A memory arises  
& my arms lift  
just like that

into a nebula  
above the bed.

Shimmering  
with sadness

are the images  
I don't want  
to house

& are not  
a home to me.

The glass is always  
knocked over  
in a full room.

It's possible  
there are no  
secrets  
in the arched  
spines of mountains

& love can  
sometimes be  
the wrong word.

\*

Now that you  
are gone,

there is no one  
to remind me

to slide the knives  
back into their  
covers.

In the snap  
of a bone,

I can nightmare  
myself into any  
history—

but today,  
I don't want  
your memory's  
hands on me;

I don't want  
to be warm.

\*

Where do the days  
go? my 89 year old  
grandmother asked  
one bright afternoon.  
No, I mean, where  
*do they go?*

Her voice pulled  
at the words, as if  
to expand them,  
as if to create space  
or a well, as if the days  
might come  
rushing back  
like water.



\*

Session #3 continued:

He told me to meditate.

I told him I dreamt  
of rows of wooden Buddhas  
carved by teenage boys  
in thick Indonesian jungles—

I dreamt of their jolly  
wooden bellies  
combusting

one by one.

\*

Despite our best  
efforts, the sky's  
fine threads

are fraying, coming  
undone.

Soon, there will be a hole  
to fill, to keep space  
from seeping in.

What will we use to fill it?

How will we resist  
rising towards it, window  
of thinnest panes—

& who wouldn't want  
to look?

How many times  
have we scanned  
the stars, not knowing  
what to do?  
It seems right  
to let trust rise  
to wherever it likes—

but it shouldn't  
be given so easily to clouds,

whose business  
is to disappear.

\*

Someone's only comfort  
is the suspension  
of a constellation,  
of moonlight gliding  
the nearest lake;

someone else gets by  
with her feet pressed  
into cool, heavy earth,  
eyes closed,

hands curled in tight  
fists, small sandbags

to hold her down.

\*

I've gotten into the habit  
of holding the walls  
when airplanes fly  
overhead.

\*

Session #3 continued:

The counsellor told me to try  
a hot bath before sleep.  
Relax the limbs, encourage  
the muscles to cease  
their vibrating & chatter.

*Have you ever been curious  
about the word drown? I asked.  
The way the word rises  
on the tongue  
to the roof of your mouth  
before it's pulled under?*

\*

Dear F,

I'd learn  
any alchemy,  
swallow whole  
any stone—

&, because you asked:  
yes, I wanted him,  
the little orange tabby  
another woman  
suddenly realized  
she couldn't keep.

A timeline, a grief  
agreement sitting  
on her sofa,  
he was too innocent  
to know not to  
chase shadows  
or flickers of light.

But you & I  
understand  
the impulse,  
the strange rapture  
of wanting  
to bury everything  
you love

so you can win.

\*

One December  
when we were kids,  
my grandmother gave  
my brother & I  
advent calendars  
shaped like gingerbread  
houses, a chocolate  
waiting behind each little  
door & window.

I invited guilt  
into my bedroom  
& together we ate  
them all  
within an hour.

They made me  
so thirsty.

Later, I whispered  
apologies into each  
little hollow  
before taping  
the doors  
& windows closed.

\*

Session #3 continued:

*Try some lavender oil  
in the bath,* he said.

I thought of shaking  
the small bottle,  
transparent drops  
of oil blooming  
until the scent  
was so thick  
it might be hard  
to breathe.

I thought of lowering  
myself into the water,  
the oil burning  
fields into my skin.



\*

There's a small stroke  
of sky where my mother  
is just fine, where  
bright memories  
of her nestle just  
out of sight.

Memories of her hands  
sifting through earth  
in the garden. Of spooning  
sugar over strawberries.  
Of telling me the dark  
is easier to persuade  
than it appears.

It's better this way.  
If I can't find  
the memories,  
I can't break them.

I remember  
midnight's rule:

touch only  
shadow.

\*

Dear F,

If only this afternoon  
would lengthen,  
each rain drop  
expanding,  
each word lasting  
long enough—

The grey sky  
draws nearer, curious.  
I yell. It doesn't back away.  
The birds usually don't  
bother me, but these  
sound like small  
whimpering dogs.

Explain that.

I keep thinking  
of how they must  
nest in the ashes  
of a scorched forest.

Why do we insist  
on pain? I want

it to leave. I don't.  
Or, I want the residue  
of something vanished:

the moment morning  
frost begins to melt  
from a single blade  
of grass.

Unplug the fan  
after months of heat  
& you'll hear the quiet  
that has been softly

screaming

for you.

A mosaic of truths  
hangs just above  
my head—

I think of how  
they catch  
the particular light  
of a stormy day

when those who  
have been sleeping  
a long time waken  
to a world washed  
thin, a world  
unrecognizable:

If there is a river  
—vanish.  
If there is a season  
—vanish.  
If there is a voice,  
  
if there is

\*

Session #1 continued:

The act of memory  
always forces  
confession.

Yes.

I lowered the blade  
to my wrist.

How embarrassing it was,  
my back against  
the bathtub; I cut  
horizontally instead  
of vertically.

I didn't know how  
to kill myself.

No, I wasn't trying  
to go anywhere;

I just wanted to feel  
the burn & sting  
of that fine, almost  
soft blade dragging  
me back to my body.

—*Have you made an attempt?*  
The counsellor asked again,  
Sunlight shuddered  
through the blinds & rested  
sharply against the spines  
of his books.

On the wall: photos  
of oceans & skies.  
I couldn't tell  
them apart.

I sat up straight  
to resist

the urge to curl,  
to become small

because, yes,  
that desire is constant—

as though there is  
something attractive  
about giving yourself up  
to a clotted sky.

*No*, I said.

*Never.*

\*

F, the streets  
are thick with you.

You pace  
the hallways  
of every echo.

I whisper to you  
in the dark.

You answer  
purely in color.

It's not true  
that what exists  
in the mind  
can't live outside  
the body.

I refer to your photo  
only to be sure  
it still exists.

In sleep, my mouth  
releases dreams  
& you wouldn't  
believe  
how they try  
to force their way  
back in—

how jagged their edges,  
how they expand  
when dropped in air.

Memory, a pulse.

Soon it will be  
December again  
& you will be left  
to decompose  
in the mind  
of an approaching  
winter—

once, in a dream  
we learned how  
to breathe  
underwater—  
held each other  
at the bottom,  
laughing until  
our lungs said  
*enough already*  
& we let go, floated  
away from each other,  
up toward  
the blue light.