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These poems seek to explore how the lives of adolescent girls and young women are shaped by pop culture, sexual pain and dysfunction, female friendship, and family.

SLEEPOVER GAMES

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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I.

In My Side View Mirror, I Am A Young Ingénue

and this sub-zero is red carpet, sunset sexy
as everything is when you're 17, fresh

off first kiss and beats blasting down
South Woodland. Hair loose

in this Cleveland wind, I'm all curves
in plaid skirt, B-cup, blood-bitten pink lips

and sunglasses in overcast. I roll down
the window to see the shapes my breath makes

hot; fall in love with traffic cones, drunk
driving PSA, the dad who wants you

to honk if you love Jesus. I honk, open
my mouth to sing, slow so the boys

on Belvoir catch every word, and I moan
the insurance jingle, break hearts at street

lights, make up at stop lights, going 20
on a 35 so the world can soak me

up, flit its eyelashes back, my vision
tighter than my shirt. I-271 flirts and I lose

track of roads unfolding. I autograph
crisp air, rich with my minivan's exhaust

fumes. My cherry gloss smears as I crash
my lips together, luminous even in rush.

This Is My Body Lying To You

This is Sunday in McCoy Hall, no
roommates. I invite myself, lay

flat against this twin bed,
and consent to be your geography
lesson—all mountains and disputed

borders, glacial mouth and gulf
of me where your fingers slow
like a season—I'm like November,

icier than expected. Doubt it:
the arch, the wet, the grit of my teeth,
the sweat-lined cotton at my neck.

We fracture, shard-like, sharp
into winter; your thigh edging me
against a wall where *yes*

is the easiest answer, where *yes*,
I like that gives me time to flinch
out of your dorm, your dignity intact.

Don't expect praise for what your hands
didn't do, though I know you craved it—
how your eyes attempted to see

through what's opaque: my answers,
my skirt, my gaze; how later
with my friend, you won't ask. Here

too, you won't find what you're looking
for. You'll linger, waiting for her
to get basement-drunk,

thinking it's different when you take
what you want, in your wire-rims
and soft, veiny hands.

The Only Good Straight Men Are In One Direction

On stage in a floral pink Gucci suit, Harry thrusts
into the air, and your pulse quickens
as if to receive him—with a wink

Niall shimmies, like a tipsy girl
at a high school house party, beer-drunk
for the first time, but here, you beg

for Liam to sling his arm around
Zayn, as if to cup his breast, squeal
when Louis, all skinny-jeaned, feels

at home in Harry's arms on Saturday night,
when no one's looking but a London crowd
that could swallow them whole. You moan

when they grind on each other. Harry runs
fingers through sweaty hair, looks you
dead in the eye when he says

you're perfect to me, and even two thousand miles
away you know he's talking to Louis,
how Louis' shoulders coil to hot breath

on his neck—you'd swear it. You've analyzed
every stage-long glance, the nautical tattoos,
the strokes of microphones—it's a language

you're fluent in, this slowburn of boy-
on-boy affection: how gently they wrap
their arms around each other; you'd kill

to be in the middle of the huddle, high
on musk and salt-dripped skin—pressed
safe into eight-pack abs and long lashes.

Boy Hands

Boy hands have fat veins like deltas,
and this is their best feature.

Boy hands are often sweat-slick
with a bone-to-dust grip, parent-approved.

Boy hands write you notes with dainty
cursive, Wite-out, too many commas.

Boy hands drape broad blazers
over your shoulders in front of co-workers.

Boy hands drag you through Baltimore's
Inner Harbor, using friction to warm you.

Boy hands meander to the small of your
back and you will like the *yes, yes, yes* of it.

Boy hands clasp your fingers so you can't
anxiety-pick your cuticles bloody.

Boy hands artfully place an orange
T-shirt over a lamp to create "mood lighting."

Boy hands turn on "Crash Into Me," a rehearsed
move that only works in high school.

Boy hands mix rum and coke, swirling a red
cup. Another. And another. And another.

Boy hands go between thighs and take
stillness as an invitation.

His hands shush your booze-gaped lips,
toss you your underwear the next morning.

Boy hands can sometimes grow
into man hands that grab pussies

without asking, pinning and reducing
what your own hands can do until

you realize yours too contain rivers:
glistening, wild, and seething blue.

Upon Finding *Masters And Johnson On Sex And Human Loving At A Sleepover*

I have always been the type of girl
to turn shoulder-blade-stiff

at a well-placed hand. I practiced
kissing on a knuckle, mine, wet-salty

with saliva as I tried to imagine
what six-feet would look like behind me;

made a notch on the wall where my mother
marked my growth to make sure I could

do a tip-toe kiss, the gold standard, in heels
or flats. At 12, I was 5' 3" and afraid

of boys who tried to wrap themselves around
my unfamiliar waist—though I liked them

sweaty: post-gym class pit stains and too much
Axe spray, the only time their bodies

felt safe. The first to touch me had white-blonde
hair, kept me at an arm's length (school dance

rule), and we swayed to "Stairway to Heaven"
and lip-glossed cheers. I broke up with him

soon after; preferred the will-they/won't-they
of a French class glance. How brazen

I was with ten feet between. In eighth grade,
my friend told me a boy stuck his finger in

her; she liked it. At a sleepover, she showed
me her parents' copy of *Masters and Johnson*

and I flinched at the thinly-drawn sketches
of soft bodies, saw not pleasure but needs,

boys who wanted more than I had learned
to give. At night, I rivered my palm from thigh

to hip. My sheets cold, the door locked,
and even alone, afraid of my own hand.

Woman Is A Pain That Never Goes Away

I.

When I was born, I was given a helmet,
pepper spray, male condoms, Midol,
and waited for the first gut-punch.

II.

My vagina burns.
I'm told it's in my head.

III.

When I was 12 and got my period
I was so surprised, felt
lucky, that this would only be once
a month. I thought it would be forever.

IV.

When my best friend lost her virginity,
blood pooled beneath her. The guy came
after three minutes, and he didn't argue
about wearing a condom. She laid still
staring at the ceiling while he hunted
for his underwear.

V.

Beauty is pain, my mother told me
when my feet blistered in kitten heels
in middle school. I stared at red raw
feet during my flute solo.

VI.

My vagina burns
when I sit,
when it's touched,
when they prod it
with a Q-tip,
drowning

out my gasps.
Don't worry,
I'll be quick.

VII.

The pill made my friend
depressed, which made her
get an IUD, which made her
unable to stop throwing up afterwards.

VIII.

My doctors have given me
lidocaine, vaginal Valium,
and topical antidepressants,
so I'll feel nothing
when the hard plastic
dilator goes in.

IX.

In violet sheets, I asked the first guy
I wanted to see naked to go slow, one
finger at a time. I will never forget
how uncomfortable he looked
hovering over me.

X.

I feel most beautiful
when I am sad.

XI.

Men only want one thing, my mother repeats
like a mantra. She wonders if
my boyfriend is cheating on me.

XII.

My friend's ex told her he loved her, but
that night, he fucked someone
else. *What happened?* he texted the next

day. *Why are you avoiding me?*

XIII.

I scour online chat rooms for women
with success stories. Instead, I find
women with lifelong yeast infections.
They are advised to never eat sugar.

XIV.

I light a gardenia candle, romance
myself with soft acoustic folk,
and try to fuck myself.

XV.

In late afternoon glow,
I put on makeup, berry lipstick,
smoky eye, and try
to look like the type
of girl who might enjoy
taking her clothes off. Some
days, my mascara rivers
down my cheeks and I pretend
like I'm in a music video.

XVI.

My vagina burns,
but it used to be worse.

Portrait Of My Mother, Who Looks Like Me

It takes a lot to look this good,
you said, cream-filling the craters

of your face. Next, rose blush and lines
of khaki green, sweat-flecked black

mascara flaked under eyes, your vanity
adorned with vial and tube, coated pale

with powder and practice. I copied
the moves: the flick, the dab, the smooth

of lip and lid, the gloss and luster, with blue
raspberry roll-on glitter, strawberry Lip Smackers,

concealing pimples at eleven. The thrill
of buying NARS lipstick, the color *Orgasm*,

used in sleepover makeovers. I stood tiptoe
as you took inventory of your imperfections:

a mole-speckled back, foot's bunion, the dimples
of face and thigh. Now, you say, *You're welcome*

when a friend or stranger says we are mirror.
You hand me your signature mauve lipstick,

its sticky tube, and tell me I'm prettier
when I smile; I untwist my lips, soften my chin

on command. Your hazel green eyes water
with age, each freckle an expectation given

in. At night, I wash away tinted skin, my eyes'
navy ink, and look into myself, how the corners

of my lips curl, even alone.

Never Have I Ever

Never have I ever been the blonde girl, pale knees pressed to the dashboard in a black Porsche, kissing the boys' school's finest debater in a polo field parking lot. Never have I ever orchestrated a threesome from the middle seat of a DC cab, each hand in the lap of a Georgetown grad, later rating each boy a 10 and 11, respectively. Never have I ever been the big spoon in a plush king bed, one minute away from being caught by a parent and never have I ever loaned a tight dress to a girl skinnier than me. Never have I ever turned down boys who think a poli sci lecture is an appropriate occasion to hold hands, who overestimate the appeal of tongue, who ask sincerely enough. Never have I ever twirled around naked in a house in Cleveland Heights, because a boy asked to see every inch of me, because I have never wanted to be naked. Never have I ever tried in a math class. Never have I ever calculated the popular girls' weights in my head, and never have I ever told the complete truth in Ten Fingers. Never have I ever stopped playing a game, even when I've won.

Portrait Of My Sister, Who Looks Like Me

Your face is knife: smirk sharp with dark
hair, curlier. Chin pulled tight with a smile

like smoke, a joint in the Revere High
School parking lot. I was jealous

even in 1995, when you came out lush,
full grown garden of hazel green; black

strands, slick in amniotic. You rooted
your slimmer hips in my parallel

line and zigzagged, cutting my cheek
with offered blush, you stole

my makeup, and I yours, painting pale
with bronze, ash—more striking

than me, I don't expect an apology, but
talk to me. All berry lip and over-lined

eyelids, twins in downcast gaze, let me be
blunt—how come you river and stream

around me? I saw you once last year, the funeral.
When the grandchildren put hands on caskets,

I couldn't look at you; too mirror, too dry.
Our grandma's sister couldn't stop telling

everyone how good Stella looked, how
she hasn't looked this good in years, white

curl and frosted lip, still in velour tracksuit.

The What-If

Deep-talk Saturday and you're all thrills:
Texts sent with cheeky emojis, then
a cheap shot, I reply with gin-lips, swallow
signs I don't read, so I throw my
head-back. We're swaddled in Pendleton
chance. Under hot blankets, my body
plaid, I undress your sentences. Stretch
still, you open your shoulders and lean
them across a desk in blue-washed light
over the shadows my pale neck makes
to find what lies beneath nouns and verbs.
Against your too-soft, too wine-drunk touch,
I state the obvious: when we talk
it's a consolation prize, weeks later,
it's knäkebröd, a trail of breadcrumbs,
I'm your grocery store romance and you're
greedy for aisle-three shoulder-lean,
the ghost of mouth on my coffee mug,
hands stuck to our heartbeat heard over
my eyelashes, magenta cheeks, the
electropop. My stories will make your blood
rush and spill. Say you'll stay, don't go, don't
tell me why, over molten wax, you always take it back.

Truth Or Dare

Dare: Two prank calls in, we collapse. Heavy breaths and cackles on the shaggy pink

bathroom rug. Truth: This is the last time I will feel close to you, before your blonde hair

chokes me as blue of your eyes, and I gasp out the ways you've won. Truth: we've counted

every inch of hip, every A, every candid photo calculated for maximum likes. Dare: Admit it—

the cadence in your compliments gives away the shadows of your collarbone, the gauntness

of your embrace. Truth: I find it impossible to be nice to you. Dare: Eat another Oreo, don't

say anything about your thighs or marathon record. Dare: Let's pretend we're giggling

in black homecoming dresses, posing for the cool boys, leaving cherry kisses

on my wall for posterity, because we wanted to know what lust looked like, because we thought

we'd be brides with matching husbands from the all-boys prep school you broke first

hearts at. Truth: There's a video of us singing a song about two people who can't meet eyes

in a library. In it, I tug at my camisole and run fingers through my hair; we're on the verge of breaking

up with our boyfriends, and I can hear your alto falter. Truth: I'm only looking into the eye

of the camcorder. Dare: Watch me untangle dark strands of hair with a wink, watch yourself shimmy

to Taylor Swift, the lyrics mouthed prophetic. Truth:
every blonde needs a brunette friend, internet lore says,

but we're no equation. Dare: Add it all together—
the tight-lipped, glossed smiles, split seconds

of compassion. I've never been good at subtraction.

On A Håga Campsite, I Break Down

You say, *you look really good*
tonight like it's currency, and in

my campfire heart, the tip's not
included so I try my luck: You burn

the whole way down like elderflower
schnapps, like a middle school crush,

like your ashy blonde hair, glowing
the snow's crunch. You read me

Mary Oliver as if you were caressing
my thigh silky over candlelight

and pancakes in the rusty kitchen,
our cheeks February-flushed

magenta. You're jealous when I thread
myself tight into sweater-chested

boys, as if you didn't drunk-drag me
into bed, as if you weren't sipping the amber-

eyed French girls. Just once you tell me
you want to kiss me as if you actually

wanted to. You'll invite me into your plaid
sleeping bag, sticky with marshmallow

and beer, and pressed against your thorny
neck, I will never feel more ugly.

Throwing Up Beer In A Toilet, I Am A Young Ingénue

This is the clip the Academy has chosen
to present the nominees: all-leg and mini dress

so pink you could chew me up, spit me out, don't
bother holding back this dance-greased

hair—how it frames the lipstick smear, my sour
throat, the clumped mascara. I clutch porcelain

like an award, sink lower until my back goosebumps
against tile—something like an acceptance

speech. I watch the performance in the mirror:
the gape of glossed lips, bunched neon fabric

against sallow skin, the frat-house bathroom
light bulb flickering like paparazzi, my mouth

spills saliva and I squint, arch my back as if
I'm silk-draped on a magazine cover. Applause

rings my ears and my irises shrink blind
from the knock of someone opening the door.

II.

My 8 PM Phone Alarm Is Labeled *Holla Serotonin*

Because you have to make it
fun when you pop little white
pills every 12 hours because
you're the anxious person
in the TV ad before the windows
open and suddenly you're in
a lavender V-neck, replacing
your closet's gray-tone
palette, that, in other countries,
they call *minimalist chic*, before
you're dry-eye chopping
onions with your husband
in a canary-yellow-wallpapered
kitchen and he nuzzles his neck
against you as if you're back
from vacation and weren't
there all along cooking
his pot roast, before
you're dancing with your daughter
on some beach, her feet
on top of yours, waltzing,
though there will never be
little feet because you won't give
up these pills for anything—
because why would you
pass on your fear of merging
onto a highway, your inability
to kill things with too many
legs, the hollow-chest
spell when someone looks
at you too long.

Portrait Of My Father, Who Looks Like Me

If you work hard enough, you can have
anything, my father tells me, but

eight sit-ups in, he stares at the floor-
to-ceiling mirror in our home gym

surrounded by posters of swollen bodybuilders,
watching his skin fold like an accordion

with each coke-bottle-glasses-glare. Later,
he uses volumizing shampoo on his near-bald

head, douses himself in Kiehl's and pinches
his stomach, vowing to abstain from black raspberry

ice cream, his only weakness. Counteracting age,
he gulps flax seeds, calcium, gluten-free

toast and prunes, in ankle-grazing cobalt
trousers (*They're British*) and a tattersall

blazer. He suggests I outthink my anxiety,
as he fixes the same salad he's eaten for 25 years,

and I think of his meticulous 30-minute
dental routine and 5 a.m. workouts, how irritable

he gets when there's no fish option, no hotel
gym, and how lonely he must have been

when he read his lifelong therapist's obituary
without warning in the *Plain-Dealer*, and buried

himself in routine—our gravel driveway never looked
so weed-free, the cats' litter boxes so pristine.

Therapy As Film Noir

*For a poet you have a lot of black
and white thinking, she says,*

but I like the glamour of sleeping
on couches when dead

spiders lace my screams
into web, weave

what I wear willingly—cut:
in afternoon's haze, silk

threads twist off lamps
and whirring fans, almost elegant

in smoky light—cut:
I put on lipstick before therapy,

study my sucked-in cheeks—cut:
it's the legs, how they unfurl

to the siren call of pesticide in corners,
in shadows only I can see;

Do you like the anxiety?—cut:
My house is not contaminated.

My house is not contaminated.
My house is—cut: *because*

you find it artistically stimulating?
—cut: how do I fade when my eyes

open to black? I lie white
awake and every prick of leg

hair's a reason to choke on a mantra
of meditation, to fight or—

Fuck, Marry, Kill

Fuck: whoever is most likely
to press you against a wall, edge
a thigh apart, split you with spit,
the type you wouldn't want to

Marry: the one who understands
toilet paper should go over, who
beer-bickers about referee calls,
flosses nightly and squashes
corner spiders when you ask him to

Kill: always the nice guy,
average height and post-teenage
acne, too-white shoes, peanut
butter and banana sandwich
in hand—the designated driver
who feeds you 2 a.m. pizza,
who appreciates, so much,
you're not like other girls.

An Apology To The Oberlin College Department Of Geology

Roof-bound, key in hand, we broke
 into Mudd Library, and I searched

for the sturdiest ladder. Tough stuff, you knew
 you were more than Lorain Street: cold

brew crew, Birkenstock-clad, and co-op
 anxiety. Atom-jolted by January's

Tappan Square, you told me twice goosebumps
 were worth waiting for, yet lent neither wool

nor fleece. We tore out topography maps
 as souvenirs and between Lake Erie and here—

calcified dripstone (a warning) and *in three months*
 that will be us. By us, you meant geodes,

glass-enclosed but we tried. The agate knew
 more than we did. You, anthologizer

of limestone & lake, parking ticket
 to my full brake, I wanted you to steer, hold

my hair after Long Island iced teas
 (just \$3 at the Feve!) but regarding my question,

drunk on lava, did you see beyond the county seat,
 the clock tower? What will you do when the map's

lost its luster? Your hands shook as we peered over
 the library edge. My next question left you fossilized.

Boy Band Set List

Super specific reason why I'm in love with you;
Capitalist pop but who cares when
I'm better than your current boyfriend; So in love
they blue-stare, when you kiss your hand
I'm working it out in therapy; Devastating, epic
in fifth grade and there's no spit, no
breakup; Something sentimental (Acoustic); Condescending
silence to crafted texts, looking for
reassurance about your makeup-less face; Uncondescending
front seat hand-grabs. I'll need
reassurance to very real concerns regarding thighs;
your pit-stained sweatshirt, the good kind of
Possessive, "sexy" gonna-get-you-back
affection, hair-behind-ear while I
rant; Remember 2009? That was a good year;
hide under paisley covers like a secret.
Horny teen boy living his best life anthem;
Let's pretend it could be
Us against the world.

Swedish Lessons On The Green Line

Your voice is aquavit,
the amateur kind—
all citrus and licorice
chased with a choke,
a *god*, and an *å*
(the Swedish word for river),
which is also the sound
you make when I draw Stockholm
on your lower back. Get your
revenge with a vowel
I can taste, like Folkungagatan
or Medborgarplatsen,
voice bobbing up for breath,
then back to stream. I want to be
like the Östermalm girls,
black-on-black
with blue-tone blonde,
who don't try
on Tunnelbana commands to feel
Nästa: Slussen in their mouths.
I jump the live wire
in Söder to hear your syllables,
and the *r* warms me, flushed
in always-winter, even when I too
wear all black and no longer hear
Tänk på avståndet
mellan vagn och plattform,
but instead, move with the jolt
of the cobalt train, pressed
into your chest, where words
I haven't practiced slip through.

Poem Made Of Millennial Pink And Discarded Instagram Captions

No blues allowed,
just blush,
sugar-drenched grapefruit
glitters on marble, flanked
by mason jars of a 24-hour
champagne diet, we toast
the sweetbitter, our cheekbones'
liquid quartz, dusty
clay denim
jackets and long hair
don't care, lip glosses
the colors of gravlax,
Nantucket red, hibiscus,
fresh hickey—it was never
for boys. Dysfunctional,
cheesin' brunch
goals, we swirl rosé
like rococo; started
from the bottom
now we here
with no regrets. Watch us
strut, pose, triumph
against pale dogwood
walls, lips smacking
bubblegum faster
than any smirk
or eye-roll you throw—
leave that to us:
cotton candy
cheeky, we burst like watermelon
Gushers. Try to stain
our smiles and we'll punch
'till you need Pepto
—*about last night*,
our fingers tap
into rose gold
iPhones, *cheers*,
bitches. It was never for boys.

Spreadsheet Of First Kisses, Entry No. 8

Startled lips smash blackberry
mojito grit, I wasn't dressed for it—
to kiss a girl in a club in Prague
in black tights, forest green
jacket, shapeless dress—was it
supposed to feel sexier under
the choke of smoky palms, February
slush? One man watched then turned
away so I put more tongue into
it: more grab, more press, no eyes nor glance,
until I forgot I was pressed-jaw soft
with peach fuzz, we tasted like liquor,
like lipstick wax. My hand on her cheek,
her finger pointed to the lace of other
people's limbs, twisted hips, and asked me
what are you looking for? In this dim
room, her eyes so black I could
watch my lips lie loose, lie stiff;
I laughed in her hair, too afraid to blink.

Self-Portrait During Scorpio Season

To my haters

Bitches, listen up: I wasn't born dead,
swaddled-cotton, no-heartbeat-drama,
in the same hospital as LeBron James,
Upper East Side of Ohio, to let y'all
send me to the principal's office, whistle
me a symphony on my way to the gym,
brush off my thirsty affection, reject
me from Northwestern—no, this October
I'll be your half-Russian ice queen, spill
into your dreams and stab your eyes bloody
because my middle name's Pierce for a reason—
look, I've got an advanced degree, studied
abroad to bag a Swede (I did), the silkiest hair
you've ever seen, and your cat loves me
more than you, trust it, trust *me*. I'll destroy
you in a black velvet dress, reduce you
to a sharp inhale of breath, feed my cats
with whatever's left, custom-make you
a coffin and put you to rest before you fuck
with Richfield's best—so go ahead, call me
aloof, elitist, bitch—just give me a reason:
I'll cut you rich-red this Scorpio season.

All The Katies I Could Have Been & One I Could Be

The one who kisses Adam on the dank bus
for the sixth grade D.C. trip, giving in
to cracked-voice cheers and the first of many
clammy hands to trace her outline against

the one who doesn't shave just because
some boy smirked at the tufts growing
from her tightly-crossed legs, staring at

the one who signs off her emails to her English teacher
with *Love*, who doesn't calculate his type
based of his wife's skin or hair color, pale like

the one who inhales root beer Chapstick
off the ski club president, unclasps her own
bra, tells the truth about her music preferences to

the one who laughs when she gets rejected
from her dream college, doesn't throw away
her collection of purple and white paraphernalia to

the one who says she just wants to be friends
with needy, bearded boys in tweed blazers, because

the one who can hold her liquor, doesn't feel
guilty after dribbling peach vodka, tells them
exactly what to do with their hands, texting

the one who decides she is pretty
with the lights on, with arms uncrossed
and breath slow enough to catch.

Would You Rather

Would you rather stay
in Campbell plaid forever,

white gold rings,
knee-socked & Birkenstocked,

our skirts getting shorter
every year by belly or rebellion

or boys in the junior homeroom after
dark, or would you rather

sway to “Silent Night” arms linked
wearing tears like makeup? Would

you rather divvy up thumbprint
cookies with a butter knife into thirds,

one for each of your egos—
the thin-lipped pale

pink, the I-swear-they’re-green
eyes, the Irish-ruddy—or

would you rather get kicked out
of a party crying tequila

and wiping the spit off
my mouth because you could,

because we liked the attention?
Would you rather tattoo laurel

leaves behind our ears to remember
the jewel-button skirt we shared

or would you rather lie
across from me on a twin bed

twisting your gold class ring
in defense? Wouldn’t you rather

answer a question? I'd prefer
not to be the one to ask.

Spreadsheet Of First Kisses, Entry No. 11

Into unwashed mugs, you pour
 me a drink. Sweet, shaken to core
with tart northern sun, it's your country's
 custom to barrel-age bitter, to muddle
chamomile calm with smoke. Palms
 stick-stuck to frothed egg white walls,
you squeeze my stirring body
 infused with grenadine, lips dripping
with proof that we'll outgrow
 this apartment together. Another round:
I collapse on your lap like I've never
 twisted a kiss on the rocks, swallowed
by crimson velvet, splashed thyme
 simple syrup, blackberry fizz, mouth-
to-collarbone wet—spiked
 shoulders, dotted with maraschino
marks. I take my own pulse,
 gin-quick and cheeks-flushed even
though we've stopped drinking;
 lime-lust wedge and raw sugar
breath with legs straight up, no chaser.

Listening To Taylor Swift, I Sleep With Someone New For The First Time

I whisper this balcony breeze-bitten,
 Manhattan-hazy or smoky sunset, jump

at the camera flash to lean forward and give
 them the good side of my cleavage, the coy

red-lipped script and *let's go inside* begins
 with the one-handed shirt-unbutton, his fingers

on my zipper stop—*just a little bit*
 longer. I disappear into his shadow, deep

into cream blankets, silky sheets, the marble
 kitchen counter, my words staccato like bubbles

underwater, my ears dripping wine. I forget
 to moan against the taste of a different salt

when I pull down his jeans, pull up my bra
 strap. Here is where I start to build: lips trail

kisses like a crescendo saved for later, like tracing
 zig-zags on a steamed-up car's misty window

and *no, not yet* as he tugs the hem of my dress
 as I search for a chorus in the freckles of a shoulder

blade: do I want any of this? The flickering
 eyelash that means *yes, I found the words?* Does he

hear the high note tremble as I slip off my dress?

Sex With Vulvodynia

My gynecologist recommends
 against it, but I want to

make myself useful. I want to be
 fucked like February

in Boston, like the eyewall
 of a tropical cyclone,

hair-swept and cross-eye
 dizzy, or blindfolded

so I can't see
 the pounding

in my chest, the gunshots
 of an orgasm. Fuck me

like my body
 is an answer, like windshield-

shattering hail,
 as if a cure exists;

like a catcall
 in an elevator,

with no where to go
 but deep;

like I'm frozen
 still—hear the crack

of my collarbone,
 the staccato

of my thighs,
 don't stop

but scald me:
 until breath turns

to steam, skin
sweat-damp

and my lips o-ing
as if

my entire body
could open

like a window
or a woman.

Paint Me, Georgia O'Keeffe

Brushstroke these lips—drenched pink
caves, my flesh a waterfall
of lavender, cobalt waves, grey shadows

that stay, and I whisper, *open, open*—
and the petals bloom to slit.
Georgia, you once said you wanted

to paint flowers so large,
no one could ignore their beauty.
So how would you paint me?

Exotic, like an orchid with fuchsia
sepals, my throat a bright bud
with tight roots? Or like an iris,

amethyst and butter, the dewy
standards and falls that blade
into crest? Or the smooth calla

lily, pure cream-spilled spathe
and yellow spadix sweet? In a mirror,
I unfurl like blood orange poppies;

inside, black eclipse. Seep red
down my legs like a canna,
swell me rose-pink like hibiscus,

mural my body too big for canvas.
Convince me of blossoms within
this blackness, this pain no one can see.

And I Too Breathed You In

Is it a love poem if it's made of salt,
palm, soft, and peach? Circle yes
or—yes, I've run fingers-to-scalp

with other boys, had candlelight
wine and high expectations, eaten
rosemary chicken during my vegan

phase—but it's something we must
accept. Press bones and I'm weak
knees, press two for more options:

your crow's feet, belly, always ice
cold hands. I tell you it's mine
and you sew us together, ripped

jeans and turtlenecks we share,
bundled like Saturday mornings
in cotton cocoon. As for peach,

I linger in your overgrown hair,
slicked back and sugary ripe
like wet bramble, prickling

against cheeks. I sometimes wonder
what letters your pupils are writing,
your eyes like lungs, the inhale sweet.