

## Last Words

When the cancer crumpled you  
like paper, there was a note

written on your skin  
I couldn't decipher.

Between the scars  
from all the surgeries

trying to save you for a little longer,  
there had to be something

important, or else why  
did this have to happen?

Was it a warning? Or words of love  
you couldn't speak

when you were healthy,  
let alone when you were sick,

the tumors growing  
along your esophagus

writing their own cruel language?  
Left alone, I tried

to piece together meaning,  
a cypher in whose answer

a kindness could be found,  
but no. There's nothing

to be done  
about the nothing

hidden in the trees, the arbor  
where the quietest animals linger

and hope that nothing  
will make a sound.

## Some Notes on Talking to Transphobes

When they ask what your name is,  
they don't mean now. I promise.  
There's no other time that matters,

but they want a past,  
a list of references, a drug test.  
When they cut you open

and stab at the stone inside your chest,  
it's not with any notion  
of progress. They want blood,

and they want your blood  
to spill like a black waterfall.  
Stand near trees that catch the moonlight

so they'll run for those shadows.  
It's better if we can't see  
each other at times like these anyway.

Just ignore them, with their blue lips,  
with their teeth like prayers  
in service of a blood-soaked god.

Even the ones who lick your palm  
before they bite.  
There's nothing I can do

once their bark is inside your head.  
I've been carrying that sound  
for thirty years. Every time it echoes,

my blood ripples,  
and I return here  
to tell myself all this again.

## Hallucination

In the ever-quiet night of a rural township,  
you say something for the first time  
in fifteen years, your voice  
like the call of a bird once thought extinct,

harbinger of an age before this one  
when all I had was the gender you gave me,  
broken toy gun, and a word for love  
without condition, as long as I behaved.

What could you say to me now,  
daughter you left as a son  
the night your body collapsed, rotten fruit,  
and you were free of parenthood,

that would make up for lost time  
or raising me as a boy who wasn't  
supposed to like dresses or  
my great aunt's Polly Pocket?

Why visit now? I approach the source  
of your cry, but you've become  
like the deer at the end of the driveway:  
so quick to flee.

It was easy, wasn't it, to appear  
and before you would've let me see  
your disgust, to disappear again  
before I could hold you one last time.

## **Girl**

*For Emily*

To have the courage at six  
to explain to your mom  
how boyhood was a too stiff and ragged coat,  
before the world had even fully dropped  
its ideas of gender onto you  
like a heavy snowfall.

You had a strength I didn't,  
I who used to cry in Sunday school  
because I couldn't sing with the girls,  
but didn't come out until I was  
twenty-seven and chose finally  
the pills for womanhood  
over an overdose.

For this, I'm jealous.  
For this, I'm grateful,  
that someone could slap away  
dawn's hand of light  
and say, *this is the way*  
*I will raise myself.*

To avoid the detour  
of a dropped voice you'd  
need to relearn how to use.  
No fixing your face  
with a razor or a scalpel,  
but only a brush.

Thank you for being  
what I couldn't. Thank you  
for the blouse of your gender.  
You carry yourself like the blackbirds  
carry the morning, thank you.