

i.

an all nighter.

    caffeine-induced insanity.

the sky bowing into darkness, light sculpted

soft in the flickering of a computer screen.

swallowing the truth and

    spitting it back out.

the desire to be reshaped, reborn

into something holy. you cry until your body stops

trembling, until your hands have been scrubbed

clean of depravity, the night just as miserable

    as the last lit streetlight.

ii.

want spirals into

    guilt spirals into violence.

the church pews are empty in your dreams.

you ask for forgiveness in the silent

hum of an abandoned building. crosses

form on your skin through painted glass windows

    and you take a knife to each one.

the heart—homicidal.

the soul—inconsolable.

you swallow gasoline and let it ignite,

feverish in repentance, something blistering

at the back of your throat.

you wake up,

    still on fire.

iii.

salvation comes in the form of

a stranger by the ocean, two years later.

    she tastes like oranges, florida heat,

citrus spilled sticky on skin and every wave

kissing our ankles as if starved for human touch.

august like an impossible runner's high.

you want to keep the moment strung up in

    golden thread, tattooed somewhere

in the spaces between each heartbeat so you won't forget.

you learn how to coexist with your body again.

she leaves the next day like a ghost on the shore.

iv.

you bury any last hopes of roses on your doorstep.  
you will never be her boy,  
you will never be the girl your parents  
wanted you to be, and you will never  
be the princess in the castle  
    waiting for the prince to show up and slay the dragon.  
you're not even the prince.  
    you're just the dragon, spitting out flames and leaving  
    nothing but destruction in your wake.  
sometimes, you grieve for the child  
you will never have. sometimes,  
tenderness like a heart attack hurts  
    more than you can handle.

v.

i am six inches taller now but  
    i still feel you wherever i go.  
i cut my hair short like we always wanted to.  
i smooth out old scars that we always hated,  
    leave them to heal in the sunlight, warmer  
    than any other day we've known.  
i want to tell you that it gets better.  
    i want to tell you that we make it out alive.  
i confess: i love you still, even if you have  
    never loved yourself, not really.