

# breathing out

*a collection of poetry and prose*

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*an ode to the women in bathrooms*

an ode to the women  
laughing and loving  
and grieving and singing  
wearing glitter on their eyelids  
and rings on their fingers  
an ode to the women cursing out  
their exes  
and each other's exes  
an ode to women cursing

an ode to holy sink water  
and the beautiful women around it  
to the prayer that is  
all these women  
together  
to the tampons, gum and hair ties  
to the women offering what i need  
  
what i did not need to ask for

*british men call women "birds"*

birds like tiny feathered things  
you're so pretty, baby,  
let us cage you  
let us teach you how to speak  
repeat-after-me

birds like bird-watching,  
like hunting, birds like game  
that you can never win,  
your blood, their sport,  
their teeth in your delicate neck

birds like flock mentality, like  
walking each other home,  
going to the bathroom together,  
watching each other's drinks  
like hawks,

a group of crows just trying to  
prevent each other's murder  
birds like you can clip our wings,  
keep us in cages,  
& still,  
we will not be silent  
still,  
you will hear us  
sing in the morning  
like sending our location,  
letting our girls know  
we made it through the night

birds like migration,  
like flight, like searching for  
someplace we won't be prey  
someplace we can  
finally  
be safe

*sometimes, on the bad days,  
i remember myself a small girl*

she was all soft.

all sticky fingers and tangled  
hair. no one (but nani) could  
brush it.

to brush was to hurt was to cry  
was to stare in the mirror at  
her reflection so she could know  
exactly what pain looked like.

she always wanted to name all her  
feelings. the gentlest girl. never  
apologizing for what she felt.

she hadn't yet been sorry for her  
heart. or her stomach. or the hair  
on her legs. hadn't yet skipped a  
meal or a night's sleep.

she was the loudest little voice.  
didn't know about loss.

if there was a staircase, she  
could climb it just so people  
would look at her.

she loved to be looked at. she  
loved to be held.  
always begging for arms and  
attention.

so, on the bad days, i touch my  
skin. find the knots in my hair.  
look at myself in the mirror.  
there are traces of her. she is  
leftover in me.

how could i hate the body she  
built?  
how could she be unworthy?

## *not to be a hedonist but*

pour hazelnut creamer into your  
coffee fill it to the brim  
with sugar and smile into the  
sweetness eat a basket of  
blackberries take an afternoon  
nap in the sun in the park on  
the beach on the foot of your  
bed kiss as many lovers as will  
kiss you back touch as many  
faces hold as many hands soak  
up the smell of freshly baked  
bread and eat it warm with  
butter or jam or both



buy pretty stationery and then  
more pretty stationary tell  
your friends about levity fall  
in love again and then again  
and then again fill your  
cabinets with handmade ceramic  
mugs laugh and then charge  
your crystals under the full moon  
toast to everything always  
because you can and you should  
and celebrating feels good all  
the way to your bones

not to be a hedonist,  
but it *should* feel good

all of it

## *commodifying the cosmos*

i'm an engineer  
and i've worked at nasa  
but the truth is  
i don't know much about stars  
or outer space  
or anything, really

what i do know is that  
i'm tethered to this rapidly-dying  
rock

i know the stars don't respond to  
the names we give them  
but we keep naming them anyway

*the world is going to shit and the  
billionaires are going to space*

i know the cosmos is not a  
for-sale thing  
and i know everything we do is  
just one more pathetic attempt at  
control

still,  
we all have to believe in  
something

the man with big pockets and a  
house on every coast  
believes in selling us pieces of  
the infinity

and in our desperation  
we believe in buying them

*i could be your dream girl*

i could swallow all the jagged  
pieces of my heart  
and never tell you of the blood  
behind my smile

i could walk with you,  
always follow three paces behind  
and never once mention my aching,  
blistered feet

i could laugh away each broken  
promise as though i've forgotten  
you ever made them  
i could bend myself in half to fit  
into your open palm

i could be the softest thing  
you've ever touched  
don't get me wrong

i could be the softest thing  
you've ever touched  
don't get me wrong  
i could be  
the glimmering thing  
i could be the daydream

but what will be left of me when  
the sun has set?  
who will i be with the lights off?  
where am i to go  
if i have drawn paths to only you?

so don't get me wrong  
i could be your dream girl  
but i'm writing to tell you  
i won't be

i am writing to tell you  
i will be mine instead

## *growing pains*

i was 7 and you were 8  
we made lemonade for our imaginary  
friends  
and drank until our lips puckered  
we didn't know how to eat ice  
cream  
without it dripping through the  
cone  
we covered our hands in paint  
and played outside until our shad-  
ows puppets faded into night

when did it all get so hard?  
when did the lemons become rent &  
utilities  
and the imaginary friends become  
analysts & consultants  
(& other things i don't get?)



*when  
did  
you  
grow  
into  
wine  
tastings  
and  
outgrow  
me?*

i'm still counting down the days  
to summer vacation  
i'm practicing eating ice cream  
without making a mess,  
me & my puckered heart,  
we're running this lemonade stand  
in the darkness without you

*in elementary school, we had  
to take voice lessons.*

we had a music teacher.

in a music class.

and instruments: percussion, string,  
and brass.

our teacher taught the boys how to  
speak in falsetto, all high  
they refused, said it sounded too  
girly, they were shy.

but when they did well,  
our teacher would yell,  
“bravo!”

and that was the last time anyone  
praised them

on doing something,

“like a girl.”

she taught us girls how to speak low,  
like a man does,

with no cower,

from a place of power.

she had to spend extra time with us  
though,  
because you need to let your belly go  
to sing low, in alto.

the strange thing is  
she needed to teach us ten-year-olds  
how to unclench our stomachs.  
because after years of sucking it in,  
we had no idea how not to do it.

our music teacher said if we couldn't  
let our tummies go,  
we couldn't tap into our power.

imagine that i never did?  
imagine if no one ever told me  
that the words we say to our bodies  
take lifetimes to erase.  
that my body came with decades of  
systemic brainwash as a fee.  
that sucking it in  
for the rest of my life  
would suck the life right out of me.

*summer comes  
and i think of the fig*

i think of how it's pollinated  
i think of the wasp that crawls  
into the fig  
and dies for the sake of summer  
fruit

there is something so violent  
about the way  
one living thing must be digested  
before another can find itself  
between my teeth

summer does not dwell on this  
she tells me not to think so much

she tells me  
*“things are prettier once you  
stop needing to know everything”*

i ask summer why she hangs the  
sun in the sky  
only for it to rot  
that which she planted herself

she asks  
*“don’t you do the same thing?”*

*i am JUST Like other girls*

i mean, i wrote this poem with an  
iced coffee in hand

i mean, sometimes the shape of my  
own body haunts me

i mean, i keep picking at scars  
knowing that won't let them heal

i am JUST like other girls and by  
that, i mean, i'm bleeding

i mean, i am not here to make you  
comfortable

i am just like other girls and by  
that, i mean when i was thirteen,  
i was afraid

i mean, i am twenty-one and still  
afraid

i mean, i never learned how to be  
anything else



i mean the flowers on my desk are rotting

i mean, i tend to hold onto lifeless things because they used to be beautiful

i mean, there's not a thing i love that i'm not all tangled up in

i am JUST like other girls and by that i mean, sometimes i. am. so. much. woman. that it makes you sick.

i mean, sometimes it swells up and spills out of the margins and the poem stops being what you asked it to be

i mean, let the poem be messy in the middle

i mean, i do not owe it to you to make this pretty at the end

i mean, i never owed it to you to make this pretty at all

