

From the author of *To Hear the Ocean Sigh* and *Take Me to the Cat*



in the
college
at night

SAMPLE
BOOKLET

Poems by

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TO THE READER

I am confident, or not, I am.
I speak to you, I speak to you,
and I am not talking to you.
No colors and semicolons here.
No room for underlining
simple things: love and love.
No, I speak at night.
No results. No love.
Good living? It's fine.
Yes, I am gone,
and there is a fire;
watch me burn.

ART HISTORY

Art history class at the university,
no one's paying attention.
Some naked women on the screen—
can't react, that's not professional.
Girl two rows down and to the left
is shopping for shoes online.
Guy next to her scrolls through
a slideshow for some other class.
Guy in front of me wears a t-shirt
promoting his fraternity.

Prof asks a question along the lines of,
“Has anyone here ever seen...?”
Fill in the blank, doesn't matter;
we all shake our heads no,
even if we have;
we don't want Prof to speak to us.

Defeated, he moves on.
Girl buys another pair.

THE GIRL WITH THE ANSWERS

(ADAPTED FROM *TAKE ME TO THE CAT*)

I want to talk to Catherine, but Bryce threw this party to film his music video, so he has me with Gabby by the pool. I don't not like Gabby, she's okay, but I really like Catherine, and I think she likes me back. She's sitting with Christian and Belle. I'm with Gabby. Gabby talks about her trip to California. I can't hear what Catherine is saying.

There are a couple of cameras around, though we're not supposed to look at them. No one's controlling the cameras because it's meant to all be natural. Bryce is good with video, good with singing, good looking too. Better than me. I think Gabby is here for Bryce, or maybe Christian or the other guy, who are also in Bryce's band. They're called Gender. They're great.

Gabby says she met a famous actor while she was hiking in California. She says his name twice, but I miss it both times. She tries again, but I swear I don't know him. She says he was in that one movie. I still don't know him. She frowns. Bryce from across the pool tells Gabby not to frown. She laughs instead.

Catherine wades through the water to get to me. I like her eyes best. She takes my hands and pulls me in. It's cold, but she's inviting, so I shake it off. She gestures with her head to Bryce, who sits in a lounge chair and mouths the lyrics to his song for one of the cameras. She turns back to me and then goes under. I follow.

I open my eyes and see her reaching between my legs. I feel her grip, and I tense up. She smiles, and tiny bubbles escape from her nose. She resurfaces, and so do I.

Bryce is saying he thinks he got enough footage and everyone can go take a fifteen-minute break. Catherine pulls herself out of the pool, readjusts her swimsuit, and then joins the others inside. I wait awhile in the water. It's chilly for August, but that's okay. We leave for college in a month.

I get out, and Bryce pulls me aside. He says he's got some people, some business people, who think he can get twenty thousand views on this music video in the first week. He wants to use this to convince Christian and the other guy to stay in town to work on Gender. I say I wish them luck. He says he doesn't need luck but views. I suggest a crappy filter over the video to make it look like it's being played from a VHS tape. He says he likes the way I think.

Inside, Catherine is chatting with Gabby and Belle. The girls laugh, and then Catherine notices me. She smiles first with her eyes and then her lips. She walks down the hall, and I follow.

We're in the bathroom. She kisses me hard, and it's less sexy than it is painful against my teeth, but I pull her closer anyway, and we push against the counter. She coughs on my neck, and I grab her lower back. Someone outside tries the door handle, but it's locked, so we continue.

A minute later, I'm holding on to the shower rod while Catherine is on her knees. I'm trying to remember that famous guy's name, the one from the movie, but I can't. I don't know if I should know him or if he's only been in indie films, and so then it's okay if I haven't seen him, but not really. Bryce would know, probably, or those business people. It's not even that good of a song.

Catherine uses some toilet paper to clean up, and then we leave the bathroom. Bryce, Christian, and the other guy are looking over one of the cameras. Bryce says it was pointed the wrong way, and so we'll have to go back out and do it again. Christian scratches his head, then says that's fine, and he goes outside with Catherine and Belle.

Gabby joins me by the pool. I ask her the name of that famous guy from the movie, but she wants to tell me about this poetry she's been reading instead. Bryce says something about losing daylight. I can't hear what Catherine is saying.

ANOTHER WARM BODY

This is at a college campus party.
I'm twenty-one and so are you.
We take sips of our drinks
and banter back and forth.
My hand is in your hair,
your fingers on my chest.
We're lost,
lost in the middle of the crowd,
lost in the rapidity of life.
We're lost,
but it is right here where I am,
going slow when I look into your eyes,
going fast when I kiss you,
going to our own time,
both of us unafraid and not embarrassed
to try new things.
And it doesn't matter if I love you
or if you love me back—
if we wanted the truth,
we wouldn't be here.
So we move forward with what remains,
straddling adulthood and childhood.
We're lost. Without limits. Do anything,
to feel anything, at all.

HAVING FUN

Daniel thinks it would be fun to burn all the money we have on us. An anti-capitalist middle finger to the systemic oppression against us meager college students. Philosophy and power systems. Stumbling over words. So, way too drunk and with no hope of coming back, we hand over our ones and fives and twenties, we take Zoey's lighter, and we set the cash aflame.

Jenna returns then with Daniel's car keys. The bills are burning in a touristy pot from a Yucatán vacation. She screams at us from the front door, calling us a bunch of fucking idiots and mentioning several biblical figures by first name.

Daniel laughs at her. We laugh at her.

Jenna asks how we possibly thought this was a good idea. She asks how we're going to pay for Lyla's graduation gift or that summer road trip to San Valla. She talks about her tuition, her GPA, the three jobs she has to work to keep studying here—and we're just gonna burn our money like that? In an on-campus apartment? On a school night?

Daniel stops laughing. He tells her to leave if she's going to be this way. She says this is her apartment too, you know. Daniel says it's a majority rule. He looks at us expectantly, and we

nod. So Jenna should either change into her swimsuit and float in the kiddie pool with Shani and Colin in the other room, or leave. It's really that simple. We nod that it really is that simple.

Jenna looks from Daniel to the baggies of coke on her coffee table, shakes her head, and then leaves. Daniel claps as she does so. He then turns to us, arms wide and raised. He asks who's ready for more shots. With our faces illuminated by the flames, we say, we are.

REALLY DRUNK (WHEN IT'S 99¢ MARGS AND YOU HAVE NO SELF-CONTROL)

It's so dumb that there are over
1,000 different beetle types in the world
who needs that many
who even cares
I guess entomologists need a job
but still
oh well
while we're inventing things
and creating civilizations
beetles are just adding new species
that are the same
but with different wing
patterns. They're trying their best
by not trying at all
Something to admire

Who else is tired of the whole
existing thing

me
I am

It's hard
& I want to go home

Please run me over
72 times
until I am *pulp*

Do emos still exist
or is it just that everybody wants to die now

I was that kid in kindergarten
with the full set of crayons
in 64 colors
It didn't make me feel better though
it always made me feel out of place
and so I begged my mom
to buy me the cheaper brand
with just 8 colors in a box
so I could fit in with everyone else
childhood is weird
I also lied about being a vampire
but that's unrelated

This class ends
in approximately two hours
I love you
Drink more water
Sit up straight

LETTING GO

“Can you,” Josh says from the couch, “get PTSD from a bad breakup?” then laughs at a coloring book full of penises. It’s the weed. His first time. Drank a two-liter of Mountain Dew to try to suppress the coughing. No help. My only suggestion was to twist it eleven times to the right. That’s how you get the perfect joint. That was the advice you gave to me.

Relaxing with this group of freshmen who thumb their phones and pretend to have similar interests. This Tuesday night, I’m the eldest. I can see my breath. A ghost who is confused about being a ghost, speaking incomprehensible onomatopoeia and exclamation marks while they, as if in a B-movie horror flick, hold responsible the wind. “Just the wind.”

“Valedictorian?” Someone, at this party, referring to me. Someone I don’t recognize, saying she and I went to high school together, her being two years below me. She tries to remember more. She blurts out that I wrote that one book, that I ran track, that I dated you.

But that was a long time ago. I write silly poems now. Now? All is well, I think. My life is different; I’m being purposefully vague. New subject—her major (Russian studies), why this university (scholarships), how she knows the host (roommate). She says she heard our split was messy, and it was.

I ask how you're doing.

She frowns. She says someone went to visit you in the evergreen, and that you were always out of it, and there were so many drugs, that they found you passed out on the concrete one morning, something about a literal fight club. She says I should reach out to you, maybe. Tell you as much as myself:

“I am through with being sorry.
I've expressed my many regrets.
We both know how awful I feel,
even years later. Heavy heart.
So now, all I have left to say is,
well, is thank you. For loving me.
There were plenty of times
I didn't make it easy.
And yet you did love me.
And yes, of course.
I loved you.”

No. You and I dated for a long time, and that was quite a time. But we made each other miserable. A lot of terrible things used to make me happy. And so I know now to leave you well alone, how apologizing would mean forcing my way back for mere performative nonsense. To recall. To relive.

She nods, asks if I want to vape with her. I pass. I think about Josh's question instead—how at last, knowing you, I know I cannot know you. How we spent that one summer lighting old fires, those night-drenched memories, waves lapping in the distance, the stars, stars and beverages, and the drinkers, young and old, fizzled and errant, sympathy we couldn't fake anymore, and that makes us unfair somehow. How we tease getting close to the water without making contact—the water that got us into trouble but wasn't even water at all. How, if you have left your life, how much of your life is left. Which life you left for. I will never know.

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In the College at Night is about a young man's coming of age within the complexities of campus life.

Full of pathos, poignancy, and provoking introspection, this poetry collection guides readers through the quiet magic of a summer romance, the generational restlessness of packed parties, the angst of a hopeless relationship, and the self-reflection of graduation afternoon. In the style of spoken word poets such as Phil Kaye and Rudy Francisco, Loney's poems capture the clumsiness and spirit of today's youth and their rampaging wild hearts.

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