

PROLOGUE

The most important lesson I've learned

since I turned sixteen:

Love can't be contained
in a word, a kiss, a single heart.

Love's a pandemonium of parakeets,
free and bright.

Love isn't a single beat; it's a serenade,
one line rolling into the next.

Love can be stretched like toffee
across bodies and lips.

Love won't shatter when it's held
in more than one hand.

Love doesn't need to be divided
between only two people.

There's enough of it
to go around.

DEATH'S COUNTRY

So I'm not afraid of letting love in.
I'm afraid of letting it drag me down,
 down,
down,
back into
the underground.
Which is exactly where love
is trying to take me tonight.
(If I have the courage
to follow it.)

CHAPTER ONE

Every hospital reeks of distilled sadness;
Mount Sinai in Miami Beach
is no different.

As me and my girlfriend Renee
escaped its halls,
I gulped in the night air, clearing the dead-dream rot
from my lungs.

Renee's hand was wrapped
tightly in mine, a gift I didn't want to surrender.
My other hand was
(strangely)
empty.

But that emptiness was the reason
we stood
under the Cheshire cat grin of the moon,
carrying
the burning afterimage of our girlfriend
in her hospital-room-turned-tomb
as 2 AM
bled into 3.
We were a fractured pair
when we were meant to be
a trio.

And it was all because of the foolish bargain
I'd made
while living in a city divided
by two rivers—
one of which had tried to swallow me
whole.