Turning

I've turned many times before — have turned against:

Against my family, I have turned away and out of the door, have backed down the driveway and out of their lives forever. Or maybe just for my forever. Once you feel the guilt of association you can never get rid of it, the "I am sorry that you know me," the "I wish I could have made you more proud." Turning down the halls of our house, evading my siblings so that they do not come into contact with the infectious disease oozing out of my mind. For I am afraid that I will stain their precious hearts, that even the most gentlest of touches— the back of my hand on their cheek — will seep into their skin and through their bloodstream, eventually rotting them from the inside out.

And I have turned against myself, of course, but I'm not sure when that particularly started. I know that after *him* things changed, but the gravity of my self-affliction took a very sharp and very, very wrong turn at some unidentifiable point, and now I do not know where to turn back to. And I feel it wholly. Every morning when I wake up and step out of bed I collapse into a dirt pile, a spreadable mess, something to be swept away and taken care of. And then I go about my day— days spent driving on the highway wondering what asphalt tastes like, what the sensation of the dirt and rocks sliding into my nostrils, and my mouth, and in between my teeth with such and insatiable force would feel like, what it would do to this object of "me". In the daytime, I see myself as a shadow, and then at night when the lights are finally dimmed, as no one at all…

Turning. The time is now 8:32 pm, and I am barely breathing. As I turn down the slinky hallway of Oak Street, as the great light above begins to dim, I am playing a game with myself where I try to see how long I can hold my breath. That is, I hold and hold and hold and hold and

hold my breath even though it starts to hurt so badly until I reach that culminating point where the pressure inside of my lungs starts to tear its seams, and then I release. It's dumb, it's actually such a fucking stupid thing to do, but that split micro-moment where the holding of the breath spills into the releasing of the breath is all I need to remind myself what living feels like. Because it is really hard for me to convince myself that there is more life to be gained in this darkness, that it is even possible for life to be nurtured, and to grow, and to thrive without anything to fertilize it. I think these things as I play the game, as I walk.

Where is the life? The invisible windows to my left display storefronts as barren, liminal spaces. The sidewalk below is dry— there are not even remnants of water in the cracks of the sidewalks, not even residual dog shit on the ground — no sign of life. *I breathe in, I hold, hold, hold, hold, I release*. The faces I walk by do not show life. There are the individuals: so tired, so worn, faces sinking and furrowing, countenances melting off their faces until there's nothing left. There are the pairs — the couples, the life-long friends — so used to each other that they walk side by side, forgetting that the other is there. There is no energetic pull working between them, no life reverberating between them. *I breathe in, I hold, hold, hold, hold, I release*.

But then I look up, and sitting on the street light, I see a black bird, almost invisible against the obscurity of the night, save its bright orange beak. I stop, I look at it. It is alone, surveying the lifelessness of the city below, taking all of the lifelessness in. It turns its head with such a sharp ferocity that you would think something interesting was going on below, something worth accounting for. How trivial. But right before I continue to carry on, the orange portal suddenly opens, and the bird releases a call. It is not some beautiful song, but a shriek, a whimper that calls and begs and prods and demands "Please, see me, notice me, help me." I look down at my feet, then back up at the bird as it looks down at me. *I breathe, I release.*