

I haven't lost a tooth in a decade.
But this was like the hole left in my gums –
still bloody and wrecked and foreign in my mouth –
where my tongue edged, wary and *mourning*.

This is how I lost her.

I don't *know* if I was in love with her,
but I loved her.
Childish and fast, sand in a fist white knuckle tight.
She did, she said, love me. She loved me she loved me sh-
And I longed to hold her hand, just once.
But the miles dragged fat and burdened
the weight unwelcome under snapping beams.

When it happened, there wasn't a term,
something simple aside from heartache.
But *now* –

Ghosted – /gōst-ed/ *verb*.

To kill a relationship in the bed where it sleeps
and leave the sheets and headboard bloody.

It took five years before she brought the shotgun into the backyard
and sent me reeling with the silence,
left me alone in the crowded room, ears ringing.
It was a chest wound, brutal, but bandages don't stop bleeding.

There was a time I'd have sunk into the ocean, if she'd asked,
offer up my body for possession.

Now. *Now* –

This ever-existing ache in my chest
is the rattle of a loss I can't stop, shouldn't keep, feeling.
A poltergeist or a haunting or something demanding a priest- but

But.

I've lived with ghosts and ghosts
will always make themselves known.
This is a phantom limb.
My tongue is pressed against my gums in the absence of bone,
copper and bitter and *wrong*, the way I hear her name,
echoing even when I don't bother to speak.
The way I feel her hand in mine, a hand she only ever held once.

This...this is how she left me,
a mouth half empty – wishing to talk to the dead.