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### A Little Miss

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A Little Miss

by

Priscilla Bernauer

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Department of English Language, Literature, and Creative Writing  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at the  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

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A Little Miss

by

Priscilla Bernauer

APPROVED BY:

---

Dr. L. Freeman-Gibb  
Faculty of Nursing

---

Dr. N. Markotic  
Department of English Language, Literature, and Creative Writing

---

Dr. S. Holbrook, Advisor  
Department of English Language, Literature, and Creative Writing

April 20, 2017

## **Author's Declaration of Originality**

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication.

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## Abstract

All of us face moments in our lives when our perspective of the world changes. One of the most drastic ways to experience this change is through the death of someone you have known and loved for your whole life. On September 6, 2014, I experienced that change when my little sister Emily passed away suddenly. Ever since that day, I have been trying to restructure my life so that I can function and contribute to society. My thesis is about this struggle. Through 80 poems that I have written, my creative thesis tells the story of my grief. I am not demonstrating how to grieve, though I am demonstrating how varied and uneven and unending the process is. Using psychoanalytic theory, I ask myself whether or not I am grieving correctly. Inspired by literature in which form communicates as keenly as content, I have created a looping structure in which the reader of my work can choose, after each poem they read, up to three options to continue on with. This structure might suggest an element of free will in the grieving process, but in reality the choice is an illusion because the options are limited and follow disorienting, unpredictable paths.

One consequence of this looping structure is the reader's inevitable re-encountering, therefore the repetition, of some poems. My intention is to practice insistence, a method of writing that Gertrude Stein pursued to change the meaning of a word or phrase (or in my thesis, a poem) by repeating it until the reader saw past traditional or clichéd meanings. This insistence helps generate multiple layers within my work as a whole, and reflects my pursuit of expressing my relationship with Emily and my grief over her death as unique, but still accessible to readers. With my personal grieving experience comes constant ruminating, and with each reader's different choices, they experience different objects of obsession, with changing views of a single poem every time they return to it after venturing further into some of the others. My hope for this thesis is to show how isolating and overwhelming grief can be, its non-linear, recursive nature, and how varied each individual experience is. Although Emily was little in size, the effect both her life and death have had on me is reflected in the complicated looping structure and emotional content of my thesis, *A Little Miss*. I dedicate my thesis and all of the time and research that has gone into it, to my little sister Emily Bernauer.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Susan Holbrook, for her support and positivity during the course of my thesis.

I would like to thank my university friends, for never giving up on me during the process of my grief.

I would like to thank my family, who, despite the hardship they face, make Emily proud everyday with their kindness and love.

Thank you Mom, Dad, and Cj. I hope you find her here.

And,

I dedicate this work to my little sister, Emily Bernauer. I wrote you a book.

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## A Little Miss.



i set a path for you,  
i know grieving can be hard  
understand that it can  
unravel in the options i give to you  
or it can  
happen in a straight line  
if you feel grief should  
be that way  
i want you to  
forgive yourself for these choices  
if you need me,  
you can call me big sister



## Your Story

You asked a good question.

As September 6th dies again,  
I check the world for mailboxes.  
People write to me, and they say happy birthday to you,  
and sorry she died, again.  
It won't be the way you planned, again.  
I never bought that poodle skirt, but  
damned if I did not make her a flower child.

*I Made Glass Bend, Apologies* (page 17)

*Am I A Child?* (page 27)

*September 18, 1995* (page 42)

**I sit on my hands and my fingers sink to the floor.**

I pretend I can play the piano on linoleum. I haven't heard you sing in a while.  
You're old, some part of you is old, and they only think the youth part is the tragedy.  
You meant more than all of the rotten fruit in the world.

More than fried fish on a plate.

My neck is sore, I feel "the bad" swell my neck.

*Perchance* (page 8)

*To Dream* (page 19)

**You tend to lose your eyes when you smile.**

People say we look alike.

*I sit on my hands and my fingers sink to the floor* (page 3)

*To Dream* (page 19)

## **Do You Remember The Great Escape?**

One of us whirled into uncharted matter.

*I Was A Star Child Once* (page 7)

**You Were Great, Sad.**

You weren't often crying. You'd drag your feet on hard stone and then stick your foot into the stomachs of your enemies.

But when you cried, oh, the clouds ripped themselves from the roof of our house to hold your cheeks up.

Our shoulders grind into our collar bones. Because you cry.

*Am I A Child?* (page 27)

*21 Days* (page 23)

## **I Was A Star Child Once**

This is where she watched scary films,  
and this is where we practiced a rudimentary solfege.

I don't really know exactly what "being strong" is supposed to mean,  
so I try to "do"  
everyday life, apologizing  
between tears and overreacting  
to loud noises.  
I'm trying to be one of you, even though I never wanted to be before.  
I was something more when Emily was around.

I learned my lesson. Please let me have her back now.

*Do You Remember The Great Escape* (page 5)

*What Does It Mean* (page 22)

## **Perchance**

I thought I saw you the other day,  
ruffling feathers underneath our kitchen table.  
Did our cat Sweater invite you to tea  
by the chair legs?  
But you declined and flew out the window...

You liked the word “defenestrate”  
because that’s when you knew all hell broke loose.

*Fade Off Into An Intergalactic Reverie* (page 20)

*I Was A Star Child Once* (page 7)

**I name them so they know what they are.**

The best of us.  
I don't get a lot of you anymore.  
They tug at you, the abstract you,  
and I forget, humming 60s songs,  
counting the pieces left of you in the marbles stuck between the stove and the counter.  
They aren't your marbles, but everything else is picked out of my head,  
so you can be marbles for a few minutes.  
I guess you never really played with marbles.  
I can't remember how they got there.

*What Does It Mean* (page 22)

*Am I Strong* (page 10)



**Am I Strong?**

You're the strongest.  
You lifted four people at a time,  
whispering "I'm here"  
with your lips pressed to their ears  
and then you cried  
as you catapulted them to safety  
past gaseous tufts of the monsters you dream of at night.

The monsters could slit our ankles and bind our lips,  
but by god it'll be your whispers and footsteps  
they hear at 3am.

*I Sit On My Hands And My Fingers Sink To The Floor* (page 3)

*It Feels Better Now*, (page 84)

## **You Mean, Did You Do Enough?**

I don't do well with loud noises.

*You are a storm, if not a star. You are terrifying and silent to the naked ear. (page 18)*

**What are they?**

the “Star Salve”

Left over from big formations,  
a comet races through a solar system  
leaving bits of itself as it goes.

Here on Earth, mere humans  
wait years upon years  
for another grand appearance.

We think nothing of what  
would happen if that beautiful  
comet melted in its course.

We think nothing of what it  
leaves behind as it flies by us,  
because it’s everything in our sky.

*If Life Could Be A Cobweb* (page 29)

*The Cloud. You Can’t Forget.* (page 15)

*You Tend To Lose Your Eyes When You Smile* (page 4)

**Title**

We are sisters.

*The End.* (page 93)

**May I Name One?**

I cannot articulate that  
I want to be important,  
that I want to name a fleck of stardust.  
But I'm gangrene dressed as a distasteful norm, full of rotting flies  
and unhappy staggering villagers  
who took the wrong way home.

I leave the naming to everybody else  
as the back of my neck develops a twin,  
bumping casually into my spine to say  
"Why would you get another birthday?"

*Do You Want Your Story To End Here?* (page 33)

*Am I A Child?* (page 27)

*You Mean, Did You Do Enough?* (page 11)

**The Cloud. You Can't Forget.**

I knew it was you.  
The artist? The chef? The nurse?

(That question can go into the obituary too.)

And there you were, splashing turpentine over blush sauce.

*Do You Want Your Story To End Here?* (page 33)

**I sit on my hands.**

I don't write a lot of letters.  
I ask for addresses, promise postcards  
then blame it on the postman.

The year you died  
I collected hundreds of letters from others' hearts to you.  
They hang from your tree.

I try sitting calmly when days are supposed to be quiet.  
I want the hearts to make sense, I want them to talk.  
To say something you would say.

When I finally start rooting at the base of the tree

I hallucinate trees spelling out "stunning"

*Same Old* (page 80)

*Where Was I?* (page 82)

**I Made Glass Bend, Apologies.**

Sometimes I watch the sunroof.  
I think I could go sideways, backwards, onways, offways,

I could be better, could be better than that too.

If I hear one more person tell me tomorrow is a new day, I'll grow eleven feet and  
cut my face  
on that sunroof.

I'll stomp my feet and pound my fists into the "objects in the mirror  
are closer than they appear".  
I don't need anybody else  
telling me the wicked world goes on  
even when good girls die.

*Exulansis* (page 81)

*Do You Remember The Great Escape?* (page 5)



**You're a storm, if not a star. You're terrifying and silent to the naked ear.**

*How Do You Calculate The Value Of Stardust* (page 39)

*Slant People* (page 40)

**To Dream**

I found you in a garden.  
You showed me around, told me not to touch the foliage.  
Asked me how the world was going for me, laughed at  
my petty, earthy problems.

I asked if I could visit you where you live now.  
You stopped laughing.  
Turned to stone? No, to a picture of yourself.

*Treading Through Fog In April* (page 31)

*Shading* (page 79)

### **Fade Off Into Intergalactic Reverie**

As if there's no difference between  
twelve days to nineteen, and actual nineteen.  
They say you were nineteen.

They don't know we were planning our birthdays together,  
looking up tent prices, asking what kind of cake you liked,  
I asked if you'd be mad if I skimmed on real flowers and got you fake.

They don't know, or don't care  
I spent my birthday in a funeral home,  
that my birthday was the last day I saw you.

I didn't eat my cake that year. I knew I wasn't supposed to.  
That's not how we planned.  
They say you were nineteen, as if there's no difference.

A whole birthday.

*Exulansis* (page 81)

*Bigger Than Me* (page 92)

*What Are They* (page 12)

**What is the lightest element in the universe?**

I think the lightest element in the universe is grief.  
I've had to pack it in my pocket or small purse,  
take it out in the bathroom between classes,  
put it away so that people aren't uncomfortable.  
I accidentally take it out in public sometimes,  
so light it floats up from my bag and I have  
to zip it away. The shame gives me more  
time to find new inner pockets.  
I can bend glass and metal with my mind.

*I Made Glass Bend, Apologies* (page 17)

*If Life Could Be A Cobweb* (page 29)

**What does it mean?**

It means you get another 2am drive.  
See how far your arms can reach.

Close the book and try again.

## 21 Days

I've heard it takes 21 days for something to become a habit.

From a diet, to exercise, to understanding a phantom limb.

I want to know what textbook that's in, who can

dog ear the pages so I can keep checking back

in 21-day increments and say "no, not yet"

because I still think I should keep my music down

so that she can't hear it in her empty room

I still sit in bed at 2 in the morning waiting for her to

come say "it's time to go ghost hunting"

I still see pasta and know I can't offer it to her

because she doesn't like stringy tomato pieces.

I want to check back every 21 days and

say to these people that nothing about this

is right, nothing is becoming normal, and I

never want life without her to be normal.

I want to hear her scratching at my door

when I'm crying and say we should go get

iced coffees, I want to hear her yell at me

for touching her laundry, and I want to

hear her say, when I'm at my lowest, that  
"you worked too hard for life to get you  
this way" but I know that every 21 days  
I'll still have not properly formed a habit.

*It's Easy To Sound Angry* (page 86)

*Is This Yours?* (page 90)

*The First Word You Read Impressed Me* (page 69)

Thursday February 6<sup>th</sup> 1:44am

Time can really heal anything, time can make you into a whole new person.

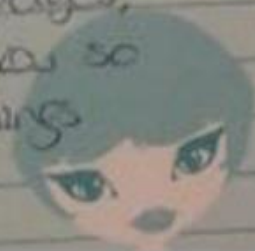
Maybe a better one, maybe not. But when you're becoming this new person and growing, it's cool to see the

people around you change too. Life's too short to wait around for something or someone, either go get it or leave

it alone. If you give something your all and don't get it, it's not your fault. Don't hold on to the past,

find something better. Be a better person and don't hold grudges,

everyone's going to hurt you so don't hold on to bad things.





**Things Aren't Linear Anymore.**

Why don't you finish your sentences?

You talk, stop half-way,

I'm sure you're busy thinking of other

cures for dime-rust and

tooth-decay in shark babies.

I remember when

you finished a sentence:

you looked at me,

eyes glassy, heart-broken

saying they are out to get me

I consoled you, told you

shark babies don't leave playpens

and you said no, it

was the dimes.

They'll never forgive

you for failing them.

*Slant People* (page 40)

*The Case Of* (page 78)

**Am I A Child?**

Peacock Tails.

One day, you'll stop draining  
tubs full of oil and  
rotting aorta. You'll take  
a deep breath, cry a little,  
say "I'm fine, I'm okay, I'm  
okay" and probably mean it.  
You'll stop draining tubs, stop  
waiting for bells to signal  
ends. You'll think that  
the one promise is that  
life goes on until it doesn't  
anymore. And that anything  
more is terrifying and then  
you're back to the original  
thought, the draining of tubs.  
You think of peacock tails,  
you laugh, you stop, you remember,  
and you're gone again.  
You lost that part.  
The part that laughs all day at peacock tails.

*I Name Them So I Know What They Are* (page 9)

*Christmas Day* (page 83)

## **Lullabies Go On And On**

Sleep, sleep  
Go off to our middle of the night drives,  
our air hugging in the morning.

I could still be better, but you couldn't.  
So don't cry in your sleep.

Nothing bad can happen to you now. I can take it from here.

*You Tend To Lose Your Eyes When You Smile* (page 4)

*May I Name One?* (page 14)

*Things Aren't Linear Anymore* (page 26)

### **If Life Could Be A Cobweb**

You always liked fear.

The joy you felt when fear turned blue

under your thumb

as you wound through windows of silk,

plucking the weak from the slime

so they could gain footing behind you...

You always liked fear.

A bad word could not be unheard

and so you made it a tapestry instead.

And you swore by anything

because with fear as your friend

you meant nothing by it.

Strength may come from the

fibres you left behind

but the weakest of us

will always remember

the butterfly

that was not afraid  
to save caterpillars  
from a spider.

*A Journal Entry (page 85)*

## **Treading Through Fog In April**

Stubborn shins bared by shorts  
as you run between headstones at midnight.

We were so young and certain  
this was the place to bring flowers.

Hearts blooming with good intention,  
fingers wrapping carnation stems,  
our mother reroutes us.

We take a detour home before  
we return to the headstones.

All the while the carnations  
will stay on the kitchen table,  
triumphant over cold and mist.

*Do You Remember The Great Escape?* (page 5)

*Blue Satin Pouch* (page 43)

**I've cosmic eddies in a bucket under my bed.**

You shook me when I slept,  
making sure I didn't go before you.  
You were that cluster of lights by my door,  
blinding me with refracted inquiries...  
And there I was, unconsciously answering you.  
You knew me best when I slept.

You left little baubles of solid light hanging  
on my door. They scream at me, lost:

It was supposed to be both of you.

*I Was A Star Child Once* (page 7)

*You Could Do Better* (page 61)

*What Are They* (page 12)

## **Do You Want Your Story To End Here?**

I resent the thought.  
I see the chaos outside my window, and I'm a whole extra year older than yesterday.  
I whisper, spitting out my consonants:

“Rain hard, Emmy.”

*Don't Think Of A See-Saw. Not A See-Saw At All.* (page 64)

*In Print* (page 58)



**September 9, 1995**

The screen is distorting my outside,  
and the sun is fighting with purple and green.  
I'm 5 years old today  
and I'm not supposed to stare.

My eyes are straining on the sun  
because no one has woken up.  
I'm going to have a sister soon.  
So that's something.

Maybe we will have cake when  
she comes to see us,

And how long will it take for her to  
be my size  
so we can share clothes?

My eyes are fighting purple and green  
but I stare because everyone is asleep.

My sister will be here soon,  
So that's something.

*Be Happy All The Time* (page 46)

*Énouement* (page 68)

**Maybe It's Not Happening**

(Tea  
--forgot the honey)

whispers

*probably on her phone*

*deserved it*

*irresponsible*

I did bleach my hair  
(I ripped the cardboard coffee snuggly.)

*bad parenting*

I'm sure that

*kids don't think of others*

My face is rounder now

*blaming everyone else*

Maybe I don't look like her anymore.

I turn,  
maybe the shape of my mouth is the same.  
Whispers to a baby.  
That's all.

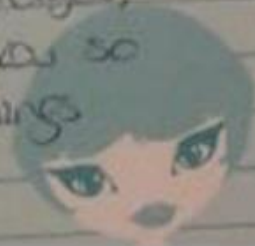
*The Carpet Is Heated (page 55)*

*Title (page 13)*

*I Made Glass Bend, Apologies (page 17)*

Thursday February 6<sup>th</sup> 1:44am

Time can really heal anything, time can make you into a whole new person. Maybe a better one, maybe not. But when you're becoming this new person and growing, it's cool to see the people around you change too. Life's too short to wait around for something or someone, either go get it or leave it alone. If you give something your all and don't get it, it's not your fault. Don't hold on to the past, find something better. Be a better person and don't hold grudges, everyone's going to hurt you so don't hold on to bad things.



**She dances for you**

*i want to be young forever, you said  
and we can't have babies after me*

but you watched the little blonde  
cry over cereal

she wasn't all bad

she called me ugly, but bopchee says she's from the north  
and in the north it's endearing

and when you twirled in that purple dress

you should have seen her face

little blondes get older too,  
they watch you

she looks for you sometimes

sitting on bopchee's step,  
you're not stepping over her to use the bathroom anymore

you should have seen her face

*Let's Keep It Short* (page 66)

*I Sit On My Hands* (page 16)

*Bopchee's Garden* (page 88)

**I don't like how I am.**

*How Light Gets In* (page 60)

*To Whom This May Concern* (page 62)

## **How Do You Calculate The Value of Stardust?**

*But, How Do You Calculate The Value of Stardust (page 41)*

*Build Your Own Coping Mechanism (page 56)*

## Slant People

that's the thing about people who approach from the empty side of doors,  
they enter kitchens by their knuckles  
and drop, knees on chins  
elbows on linoleum  
they can be hard to visualize  
squared off toes,  
injecting *nevermind* into their veins  
slant people ask if you set that plate down for thanksgiving  
slant people know better than to say they break plates for the white noise

they're a different species, those  
who try to talk around what they mean,  
because their questions can trigger  
the wrong percussion

humour them when you catch on,  
because slant-speak is grief,  
grief is contagious.

*Grief Under A Magnifying Glass* (page 47)

*I Am A Choice* (page 65)

## **But, How Do You Calculate The Value Of Stardust?**

Your cousins still hunt for it in the front yard of Bopchee and Pepe's house.

Amanda has a net on her rear view mirror.

Mommy, Daddy, Brother, have their magnifying glasses pointed to the driveway, looking for flecks.

*Entrance Fee* (page 63)

*In The Mornings* (page 67)

*It Feels Better Now*, (page 84)



**September 18, 1995.**

this is something.

loud mouth,  
your hair is flowing in the  
the  
the thing

the crib with a bath tub bottom,  
a window over it

ah  
yes  
you are underwater

you're screaming though  
in the sea

so i'll give you some distance for now  
but you're really something

*How Light Gets In* (page 60)

*Shading* (page 79)

*New Year* (page 87)

## Blue Satin Pouch

when i was six, i called my Pogs my “secrets” and kept them in a drawstring bag.  
emily wanted them.

until i was twenty-three, *mine* was an extension of *hers*.

it was difficult sometimes.

i regret now.

i was difficult sometimes.

*Bopchee's Garden* (page 88)

*Bigger Than Me* (page 92)

**Wallaby, Dearest.**

You asked who Wallaby was. Wallaby is my hippocampus. An emaciated teddy bear, periwinkle blue from a peyote binge. I want to decorate him with finger paint and then submerge him in a deep fryer.

*Ive Got Cosmic Eddies In A Bucket Under My Bed* (page 32)

*She Dances For You* (page 37)

**The Jester, Irked:**

Circles are terrifying. But the end, you know. It's somewhat nigh.

*To Whom This May Concern* (page 62)

*Is This Yours?* (page 90)

**Be Happy All The Time**

Mental strength is sandbags in palms.  
Raise palms: exertion of power.  
Can you hold both bags?  
Can you hold them evenly?  
Jabs. Withholding your bag of nickels.  
Mason jars are standard  
and we collect empathies.  
I haven't spit on your soles yet  
but while you're barefoot...

*Dragonflies Come In Twos Now* (page 72)

*The Reason To Get Up Now* (page 74)

## **Grief Under A Magnifying Glass**

Shrink the specimen.  
Not for you, for her.

*Maybe It Is Not Happening* (page 35)

*Exulansis* (page 81)

## **How to Paint A Sugar Skull: Part I**

How To Paint A Sugar Skull: Part I

a) **Disenfranchised Grief**

adults feel sympathy  
, but quickly fall

When  
siblings do not resolve

their feelings



## How To Paint A Sugar Skull: Part I

### **b) Seeking a new identity** (make her real again)

When ~~someone~~ Emily has been a part of your life since birth, your identity is based on having ~~them~~ Emily there. ~~They~~ Emily form[s] a part of the field or background from which you live your life, and as such, ~~they~~ Emily [are/is] essential. ~~They~~ Emily make[s] up part of the unbroken wholeness that defines who you are. This relates to the concept of birth order.

How To Paint A Sugar Skull: Part I

**c) Dealing with Trauma**

(Dice words up with the outer side of your hand)

Ay ree lay

tud ish shoe tha t is pa r ti cue

lare lee trob bub

bub bub bub

bub bubl eeng

in s s s s s s s s s s

ertinn kine ds o

f death I I I I I I I s

th a t o f trauma.

Ow er mine d d ds cah n oh nuh lee pruh sess

s s s s o mmmmmmuch

info fo fo fo fo fo rmation a

t on e ti me. Wh eh eh eh en the event is of a magnitude to create excess stimulus, it is traumatic.

*How To Paint A Sugar Skull: Part II* (page 52)

*The First Word You Read Impressed Me* (page 69)

## **How To Paint A Sugar Skull: Part II**

## How To Paint A Sugar Skull: Part II

### **a) Violating Your Own Code**

- *Turn your pain into art by writing about it, painting it, or building something you dedicate to your deceased sibling;*

Then I guess I'd build a metaphor, a sobbing sad abstraction that I don't name because pain is colourless purple, file-me-in-"don't-feel-this-today" lilac, a flavourless honey that sticks to the tabletop after she promises she won't get it dirty this time, but there's the honey on the painted wood, and there's another promise broken until you realize the honey was for you, a gift for you.

Or the thought that drifts from the amygdala to the stomach, a whip scar to the bubbly, pink lining when she said "this will be a good birthday" and the yearly reminder to myself that she intended for that to be the truth. How bubbling can change from joy to acrylic pain, I don't like birthdays, I just don't.

*Don't Think Of A See-Saw. Not A See-Saw At All (page 64)*

*You Tend To Lose Your Eyes When You Smile (page 4)*

**handling**

she's got some rhythm, that foil star that flirts with invisible ledges

she loves alignment to margins you make on the side of your page

and cliché is a sin a sin a sin

she wanted to be something more, she saw neon promises where you saw lines for cigarette breaks,  
could you blame her for leaving,

she had all of the best elements, foil stars  
eclipsed by bowshaped tattoos, penmanship tattoos

she transcends that, that,

in the end you leave her floating on water,

you have no idea what moving on is,

foil stars only know rock bottom until the world is at least ninety degrees upright again, so they can fall and so you can think how beautiful falling can be

*What Is The Lightest Element In The Universe?* (page 21)

*Lullabies Go On And On* (page 28)

*What Are They?* (page 12)

**The Carpet Is Heated.**

Am I less appealing to you,  
stewing in sulphur pools, or  
less appealing trying to push  
you out? So you'll miss  
the valleys that disappear when her smile  
does. I don't know where  
perfect pictures go,  
if exhaling can  
last a lifetime. I don't know if  
Your tears are more beautiful  
than mine under a microscope.  
So many people suffer in  
private. I pity them because Hell  
is a crowded front porch of  
waiting for bad news to reverse itself

*Let's Keep It Short.* (page 66)

*I Don't Like How I Am* (page 38)

**Build Your Own Coping Mechanism.**

If you're not quite up to the task of building a casket from scratch, consider starting ...

(I'm uncertain that I would notice this. Many others might.)

*It Feels Better Now*, (page 84)

*Imposter* (page 73)

Thursday February 6<sup>th</sup> 1:44am

Time can really heal anything, time can make you into a whole new person.

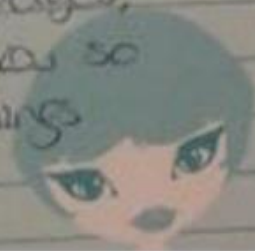
Maybe a better one, maybe not. But when you're becoming this new person and growing, it's cool to see the

people around you change too. Life's too short to wait around for something or someone, either go get it or leave

it alone. If you give something your all and don't get it, it's not your fault. Don't hold on to the past,

find something better. Be a better person and don't hold grudges,

everyone's going to hurt you so don't hold on to bad things.





**In Print**

i write letters.  
and i thought you  
hated letters,  
but i found you in  
them and the ones  
you wrote and  
it hurt because  
i didn't know you  
loved me enough  
to put me on paper.  
pictures of us, bags  
of nickels from the  
year i was born.  
i get to know you again.  
you make me  
suspect that  
time is not a  
measure of distance  
at all.

*Sonder* (page 71)

*Did I Give Too Much?* (page 89)

Thursday February 6<sup>th</sup> 1:44am

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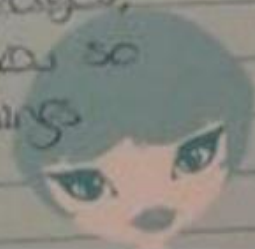
Maybe a better one, maybe not. But when you're becoming this new person and growing, it's cool to see the

people around you change too. Life's too short to wait around for something or someone, either go get it or leave

it alone. If you give something your all and don't get it, it's not your fault. Don't hold on to the past,

and something better. Be a better person and don't hold grudges,

everyone's going to hurt you so don't hold on to bad things.



### **How Light Gets In.**

Ivory doesn't taste  
anything like the  
advertisement promised.  
There's no fluoride in this  
tusk water. Quenched, my  
vision blurs to the  
crack in the ground. First  
thought: breathing hole.  
Second thought:  
big enough for my  
fingertips. Knuckle-deep  
in dirt, too far for  
baby cheeks, I hear a  
sigh and  
*How strange,*  
*fill it with flowers.*  
My fingers were  
always too big, and  
I could never hold anything  
for very long.  
Rather than cracks, sturdy foundations will kill me.

*Peak* (page 76)

*Where Was I?* (page 82)

*A Journal Entry* (page 85)

**You Could Do Better**

do down the driveway  
do stronger, do care of our mother  
do up in the morning, do out of bed  
they do down my cheeks

don't "my baby sister"  
don't "everything to me"  
don't "i don't know how now"  
don't "i don't know"

done and dusk,  
do again in the morning

*To Dream* (page 19)

*You Mean, Did You Do Enough?* (page 11)

**To Whom This May Concern,**

I'm very interested in this job opportunity. I find creating and cooking new things to be a unique way to express myself. I'm applying for the cooking or waitress position. However, if other job positions are available, I will be comfortable trying something new.

I'm a very quick learner in new situations and can catch onto concepts and ideas very easily. I really enjoy cooking and speaking to different people. I also am very friendly and open-minded. I think I would be a great addition to this establishment.

I am currently in highschool at St. Thomas of Villanova. My past experience in the restaurant industry started around three years ago when I was employed at the Verdi Club in Amherstburg. I also worked as a waitress for weddings and banquets at Koolini's.

Thank you in advance for reviewing my resume. I look forward to hearing from you to further discuss the details of positions available.

Emily Bernauer

*Blue Satin Pouch* (page 43)

**Entrance Fee**

please sing her happy birthday  
tell her

we are with you on your collarbone

nubbed fingernails can't  
open  
can't check

and check  
and check  
and check

toe to heel  
onetwothreefourfive  
still not in your room  
telling me the checking is  
bringing you home

we are with you on your collarbone

nubbed fingernails  
are you still growing them out?

toe to heel  
bathroom to bedroom  
exhale on odds

i can't check but they told me so

i think i saw us on your collarbone.

*Exulansis* (page 81)

**Don't Think Of A See-Saw. Not A See-Saw At All.**

On the sixth of September, the ground opened up and swallowed someone whole. The person was standing directly across the world from you, and you were thrown off balance. Maybe someone is looking for them. I rub my temples and they, the someone, float in the magnetic core, compacted by vibrations. They sleep in the Mid-Air to avoid their migraine. I imagine they feel approximately the opposite from the way that you do at any given moment. On the sixth of September the heavens didn't beam them up. I know that for sure, and my vicious mind sleeps.

*You Were Great, Sad* (page 6)

*The Reason To Get Up Now* (page 74)

**I am a Choice.**

I am settled. I told myself the truth today, and we will not be going out for coffee.

I will be okay. I can do and I will do.

But

the cat shit in your shoes.

*The Jester, Irked* (page 45)



**Let's Keep It Short.**

angry, every day,

is a petal nude smile

aggressively peach,  
aggressively clashing with my skin tone

i want to smile petal nude

it's not my pigment,  
most people notice it

blend, baby, blend, they say

if you act like it fits your face, it will

*What Does It Mean?* (page 22)

*You're A Storm, If Not A Star. You Are Terrifying And Silent To The Naked Ear.* (page 18)

## **In The Mornings**

Trauma skirts around my  
bed but I know it doesn't  
come from below  
it smacks its lips in my ear  
craving sweat and  
possibly blood of an innocent

I see Trauma:  
It strikes at floor tiles  
like the heel of a hysterical  
adult, kicking her shoes  
across the room  
because there won't be  
hospital visits today

My little Trauma,  
dancing in my cupped hands,  
bows for trigger words and  
jumps gracefully into my peripheral vision  
back into my palms

I nod at her upon getting out  
of bed.  
She takes her cue

*Don't Think Of A See-Saw. Not A See-Saw At All. (page 64)*

## Énouement

I'd tell the her and me,  
the we from 3 years ago:  
all is well my darlings.

*If Life Could Be A Cobweb* (page 29)

*Treading Through Fog In April* (page 31)

## **The First Word You Read Impressed Me**

c

i

r

c

l

e

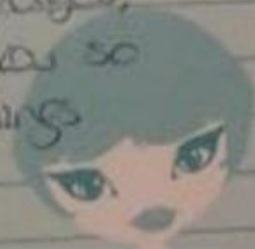
(we don't tell the first word you said)

*Fade Off Into Intergalactic Reverie* (page 20)

*Am I Strong?* (page 10)

Thursday February 6<sup>th</sup> 1:44am

Time can really heal anything, time can make you into a whole new person. Maybe a better one, maybe not. But when you're becoming this new person and growing, it's cool to see the people around you change too. Life's too short to wait around for something or someone, either go get it or leave it alone. If you give something your all and don't get it, it's not your fault. Don't hold on to the past, find something better. Be a better person and don't hold grudges, everyone's going to hurt you so don't hold on to bad things.



**Sonder**

the brunette in dark floral print  
the small boy who just hit his jaw on the car door  
the man in the knee length coat  
you with an inhaler in the parking lot  
you taking down christmas decorations  
you wrapping the glass bulbs in paper towels  
you driving a black convertible  
you who didn't hold the door for the people behind you  
you in the vegan aisle  
you staring at the fissure in the ceiling  
you putting baby clothes in your cart  
have you lost an Emily?

*You're A Storm, If Not A Star. You Are Terrifying And Silent To The Naked Ear* (page 18)

*Your Story* (page 2)

## **Dragonflies Come In Twos Now**

I left a beaded dragonfly at your grave today. I told you I'd like one back. Minutes later, two little strangers fly into the front door with me. We never get dragonflies at our house. You're a show off.

*Perchance* (page 8)

*The Cloud. You Can't Forget* (page 15)

*Am I A Child?* (page 27)

**Imposter**

a power move

my jaw is clicking

does the green ring in my eye suggest i know i have no right to be here when she's not

being pitiful doesn't make me better

nor does avoidance make me

more exclusive

sprinkle broken glass on my thresholds

a fine, crystal décor, some say

*What Is The Lightest Element In The Universe?* (page 21)

*Énouement* (page 68)



## **The Reason To Get Up Now**

- 1 poem for thesis
- research one book for thesis
- bath
- log weight
- curl hair
- send manuscripts to new students via email
- discuss rubrics
- research one book for thesis
- research one book for thesis
- use the mauve lipstick today
- photocopy pages for one book for thesis
- 1 poem for thesis
- 1 poem for thesis
- order Amy's baby shower gift online
- walk around the block
- feed fish
- feed fish
- sweep kitchen floor
- mop kitchen floor
- bake the good muffins
- 1 poem for thesis
- 1 poem for thesis
- 1 poem for thesis
- 1 poem for thesis

Points for January 4th out of 22:

(In one thousand points you get to buy a telescope)

*Handling* (page 54)

*Don't Think Of A See-Saw. Not A See-Saw At All* (page 64)

**I'm hole punching.**

It's tedious.  
She should be here.

Mom invites me into Emily's room.  
The purple sweatpants sit on her bed.  
I shouldn't be in here.

I wonder if She feels it.

*I've Got Cosmic Eddies In A Bucket Under My Bed* (page 32)

*Christmas Day* (page 83)

**Peak**

faster rhythm than most

98

i didn't work for this

She had a runner's beat

111

think of online shopping

She would have loved an infinity scarf

i don't deserve this scarf

it is cold out

She must be cold

She gave me her scarf

She must be cold

124

i don't deserve this

She should be here

She can't miss Christmas

She

she sits

watching my heart beat

98

rocking back and forth

rocking back and forth

*Is This Yours?* (page 90)

*Exulansis* (page 81)

*It's Easy To Sound Angry* (page 86)

**The Case Of**

drip and drip and drip

falling water and something about pathetic fallacy

of course there's a leak

something about cracks and sensitive foundations

drip and drip and drip

what does death by water drops have to do with anything

is it water though

is all of it water

they thought i fell asleep in the tub

drip and drip and drip

it was not me

*Sonder* (page 71)

*The Carpet Is Heated* (page 55)

### **Shading**

charcoal fingers rub you out  
of the snapshot with the lumber pile  
the sky is underwater now  
we lived here  
we were good girls here  
you had such a hard time climbing the pile  
and now i've rubbed you off of it  
i am sorry to see you go

*September 18, 1995* (page 42)

**Same Old**

i still get sinus headaches

i still can't crochet a granny square

i still cry when solving math problems or filling out forms

i still crave rooms of my crowded belongings

i still watch pepe play solitaire

i still think you're the most beautiful

*September 9, 1995 (page 34)*

*Grief Under A Magnifying Glass (page 47)*

**Exulansis**

*In Print* (page 58)



**Where was I?**

I think I was talking about aerodynamics.

“Dying” is a formidable creature!  
It swears at me in my sleep.  
It swears it's not a raven.

*Wallaby, Dearest* (page 44)

*How To Paint A Sugar Skull: Part I* (page 48)

## **Christmas Day**

At two, you'd dunk apples in the toilet and bring them to the living room to feed me. I'd never ask how such a tiny girl could reach the sink.

*Build Your Own Coping Mechanism* (page 60)

*New Year* (page 87)

**It feels better now,**

To write things down.

*Did I Give Too Much?* (page 89)

*Imposter* (page 73)

## A Journal Entry

"You'll get there someday."  
Find the positivity in losing your sister?  
Maybe the death taught you something?

I think death makes people feel uncomfortable.  
No, I think grief makes people feel uncomfortable.

But don't put it all into words, not even here.  
You know how you get with words. You get carried away.

*She Dances For You* (page 37)

*You Could Do Better* (page 61)

**It's easy to sound angry**

Grief, when I write it down, sounds angry,

That kind gesture you say "oh you shouldn't have" to, and really mean it

I get angry sometimes

*Be Happy All The Time* (page 46)

*In Print* (page 58)

*I'm hole punching* (page 75)

**New year**

We don't ring in the years after your death but rather we welcome 2003 over and over. You cried for 2004. Didn't want perfect moments to go unelogized. 2003 rings on your headstone every year. Dick Clark makes it seem okay.

5...4...3...2...1

Go Bernauer.

*I'm hole punching (page 75)*

*Do You Want Your Story To End Here? (page 33)*

**Bopchee's Garden**

they think i'm angry because i wanted the potted plants from the funeral home

i'm angry because you've become our grandmother's garden

that's all she has of you

after years of watching cooking shows with you  
and fighting over styling your hair

two years later

her Emily garden flourishes

*Maybe It's Not Happening* (page 35)

*Perchance* (page 8)

**Did I Give Too Much?**

are the people not pleased  
picking at my memories of you  
telling me they are clay  
when i thought i was a stonemason  
are the people not pleased  
should there be more of a scandal  
two for the price of one  
your body and your legacy  
but three  
i am not above *second guessing* your height  
are the people not pleased  
i die too

*You Were Great, Sad* (page 6)

*May I Name One?* (page 14)

*To Dream* (page 19)



**Is This Yours?**

just as you left it  
my left eye is going off track  
no more grip on the vinyl grocery bag  
i thought i bought it

but did you like penguins?

he yanks on the opening  
it doesn't stretch

he says maybe it is good enough

i want to see it again  
right in his grip  
left, turning inwards, desperate

i feel my food come back up

he's worried about the stretch  
i 'm worried about the tear

*Blue Satin Pouch* (page 43)

Thursday February 6<sup>th</sup> 1:44am

Time can really heal anything. Time can make you into a whole new person.

Maybe a better one, maybe not. But when you're becoming this new person

and growing, it's cool to see the

people around you change too. Life's

too short to wait around for something

or someone, either go get it or leave

it alone if you give something your

all and don't get it, it's not your

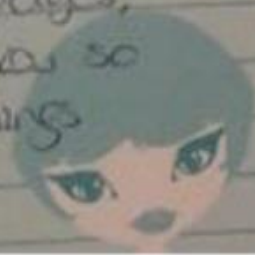
fault. Don't hold on to the past,

find something better. Be a better

person and don't hold grudges,

everyone's going to hurt you so

don't hold on to bad things



**Bigger Than Me**

as i turn corners by my thumb  
is this it?

use your words, kids

i will be non writing my pages  
i will commit to failing the blueprint

some people make little big

i must overreact

some people make little, big

i use my words to build a tantrum

and

i use my words to say she should be here

some people make Little, big.

*Title* (page 13)

**The End**

I feel I have misled someone here.

This is not the end, but more  
a means toward the law of gravity

Close the book.

You will be back.

Your Story can begin on page 2.

## A Little Miss.



you can call me big sister  
if you need me,  
forgive yourself for these choices  
i want you to  
be that way  
if you feel grief should  
happen in a straight line  
or it can  
unravel in the options i give to you  
understand that it can  
i know grieving can be hard  
i set a path for you,

## A Little Miss: An Analysis

This creative thesis has been written to simulate the experience of grief. The purpose of this simulation is to express the non-linearity of the stages of grief, as well as the varied and uneven components of coping with the death of a sibling. I created this work to find comfort, both for myself as the author and for all of those who will be reading it. In the course of our individual lives we all will grieve. Whether that grief be for the loss of a loved one or for someone we know only in passing, we grieve. Whether that grief be for someone far away and out of reach or for our own personal mortality, we grieve. While the sentiments within the interactive poetic memoir are personal, reflecting an older sister's grief, the language within offers moments of universal recognition of grief and mortality that allow the subject, Emily, to be grieved for by a reader who did not know her. I chose to call this thesis a poetic memoir instead of a poetic elegy because the elegiac tone of this work is evident and obvious; the manuscript celebrates Emily, and laments her death. I call this a memoir because of the description within this work of my personal grieving process and of my personal memory of Emily. Within the structure of my creative work, I have designed a way for her to be immortalized. Every moment of our life we know it will one day end, and that reality, of the conditional experience we call life, is acknowledged on some level as we go about our day to day tasks. In a sense this thesis functions as both an elegy and a memoir, because I am grieving for my sister but I am also documenting my grieving process. This places the overall narrative in an unfinished state, as the tragedy has happened but continues to redefine itself every time a reader continues their unique path through the multiple forking trajectories of the work. The looping

structure of my thesis tells the story of an inability to articulate “goodbye, Emily” because she is still present in the pages.

The title of this creative work arises from a nickname that Emily herself wished to be called, and that phrase, “little miss,” relates to the constant presence of my missing her, my grief over her death. As I struggle to be a productive contributor to society, she tugs at me. She is always present. Often I do try to push away an emotional reaction to memories of her or reminders she has passed away, just enough to repress a moment that I perceive as weakness in myself. I try to allow myself a “little miss” of her so that I can still function. The measure of how “little” is difficult to determine for any given day. The measure of the “miss” that I allot myself daily is frustrating because of the incalculable amount of time over which I must spread my grief. To function in society, I must contain visible expressions of grief, and to do that, I must contain the inner ruminations of the trauma I have experienced. Little miss is also who this grief is for. A little miss was a young girl who spent her life telling me that I need to write my book, and in her death she inspired me to write hers.

The titles of the poems within this work range from being true to the content of the poems to intentionally failing to prepare the reader for the content of the poem they are attached to. This inconsistency exists because of the uncertain pathways the ruminating mind experiences when grieving. When trying to cope with a loss, I distract myself with seemingly unrelated tasks that I believe will consume my time and my thoughts until I realize the path this task has taken me on has reminded me of Emily again. The world is different after losing her. An example of this change in everyday perspective is evoked in “Fade Off Into Intergalactic Reverie” (*A Little Miss* 20) in which we see a title that is dreamlike and vague, inviting the reader into a break from the emotionally heavy topic of my personal experience of grief. When the reader chooses this

title, however, they are faced with a very straightforward expression of anger at how Emily died three days before my birthday and twelve days before her own birthday. This poem itself is a product of my constant immersion in grief, dealing with the sudden and unpredictable moments of realizing what I am missing as I try to sleep at night. The title promises an opportunity to escape reality, but this escape is met with a reminder that I cannot change what has happened.

The process of applying titles to my poems is also symbolic of my attempts to gain agency over the definition of my grief. The poem “May I Name One” (*A Little Miss 14*) is a request to have some authority over how I approach my emotions and memories, a request I ask of myself. The poem fails to gain this authority, and relies on “others” to define my grieving process. Within the poem itself, the reliance is implied to be upon other people, but in the work as a whole, the reliance is seen to actually be on the other poems. The authority over defining my own grief and my relationship with Emily is seen in the poem “Title” in which the only line is “We are sisters” (*A Little Miss 13*). This statement is simple and concise, but also firmly states that tense does not change after death. The title promises escape, while the poem struggles with the progression of time. We are still sisters, and my memories and feelings that pertain to Emily are valid. The statement does not ask anything of a reader, does not expect them to accept personal anecdotes they may not relate to. I have simply broken down the purpose of my thesis into three words. This desire to break down the complexity of grief is expressed by Priscila Uppal in her poem “Searching The Dictionary” (Uppal 69) when she withdraws from the world of fictional literature that she used to enjoy with her loved one before their death. Instead, she reads the dictionary, finding new meaning within words that are often applied to grief. This breakdown of meaning is necessary when re-evaluating my perspective of the world after Emily’s death.



The experience gained from the loss of a loved one is non-linear and recursive in nature, which is shown in the ruminations I face during my grief. This repetition of thoughts insists upon finding meaning that transcends previous understandings, therefore breaking down meaning and forming a new perspective of the world. The looping structure of the work as a whole allows for re-encountering of some poems, and so after the experience of some new poems in between the initial reading and the re-encountering of a single poem, the reader's perspective changes because of the new information they receive along this way back. This journey changes the reader's perspective because "no matter how often you tell the same story if there is anything alive in the telling the emphasis is different" (Stein 288). As the emphasis changes, then the entire work, the subject of grief, and Emily, animate and become living entities. The re-encountering that occurs thanks to the looping structure constantly changes emphasis with new experience gained from the text, a depth that is created because "expressing any thing there can be no repetition because the essence of that expression is insistence" (Stein 288). The first reading of a single poem arises from the reader's personal experience and understanding of the subject. As they read on into the course of the looping structure and gain insight into my narrative, they are able to empathize with me when they re-encounter the same poem. With their journey through the work, the reader is privy to the looping structure of my own thoughts, and here they realize the looping structure does not reflect a choice in how I perceive the world. The looping structure reflects a disoriented and uncertain perception of the world that I am trying to survive after my loss.

The interactive component to this creative work gives the reader the illusion of choice. Most of the poems in this work conclude with between one and three options to continue on with. The reader is invited to follow this strategy to experience the entire story, or they are given

the chance to read the story linearly. Through the looping structure, the reader experiences re-encountering, but through the linear reading, the reader experiences the story differently. Of course, there is still the event of re-encountering, but it is not with my experience and understanding but with Emily's. Her journal entry appears six times in this work, interleaved with my poems. It is unapproachable via the looping structure, because there are no options to go to these pages. The only way a reader could see the journal entry is by reading the text linearly, or by accidentally leafing through the pages, or by following the option where the reader is instructed to "see how far your arms can reach./ Close the book and try again" (*A Little Miss* 22 lines 2-3). When closing the book and opening it again, the reader has the chance of opening it to one of six identical copies of Emily's journal entry. The tone of Emily's journal entry changes the way the reader views the story. As the speaker, I am analysing the past, scrutinizing a tragedy to find meaning. Hidden in the complexity of the looping structure is Emily's own life philosophy: simple, determined.

My work represents unrepresentability. Within my looping structure lie poems that strive to adhere to a structure so as to prescribe a coping mechanism for grief, such as that seen in "How To Paint A Sugar Skull Part I" (*A Little Miss* 48-51). These poems resonate with Sina Queyras' *MxT*, in which she enlists specific restraints for her poetry to express grief as tangible and calculable, when in reality grief is not. Her poem "Elegy Written in a City Cemetery," for example, combines the epitaphs and elegies of famous poets, creating a community of grief that articulates what she cannot articulate alone. She splices the words of the grieving together to create one deceased subject, a method that helps the reader to empathize with her loss, because she has felt a pain that is comparable to others. By combining the elegies of various writers, Queyras has shown that not only did each individual poet lose a loved one, but the reader has

also lost that person. She represents what has been attempted by many others to represent: a voice of grief that accurately describes the relationship that exists between the grieving individual and the deceased. I share the intention of inviting a reader to empathize with my work, so that the isolation that arises from my grief can end and so that the reader can acknowledge my representation of my relationship with my sister as a successful rendering.

The images within this work appear at the beginning of the thesis (*A Little Miss 1*) and at the end of the thesis (*A Little Miss 94*). The first image (*A Little Miss 1*), under the title *A Little Miss*, features a woodpile. Without the context of the subsequent poems, there is little significance in this image. It is filling space. This reflects the state of the grieving mind when they are faced with the reality of a substantial loss in their life. It emptiness reflects the loss of a structured perspective of reality that occurs with a sudden death. This is a photograph that was taken after Emily's death. The image at the end of the work (*A Little Miss 94*) reveals Emily, sitting on the same woodpile from the picture in the beginning. As the reader journeys through the work, Emily becomes real to them. She acts as an end greeter, assuring a reader of the experience they just had while reminding them she is the person they read about, and she transcends the misconception that death transforms the deceased into abstract ideas instead of real and historically sentient beings. The title above this image, *A Little Miss*, is the crown upon her head. This is her title. While the reader is expected to see the image of the empty woodpile at the beginning as it precedes the looping structure, the image of Emily could be overlooked if the reader has already been conditioned to follow the options given to them below each poem, and so the opportunity to see Emily as a real person can potentially be missed. The poem encourages readers to approach Emily in reverse, so in meeting her after death, a reader will learn more and more of the story of her life.

“To Whom This May Concern” (*A Little Miss* 62) is the only found poem within the looping structure of the collection that is written by Emily. I added this poem into my thesis to show a glimpse of how Emily wanted others to perceive her. Traditionally a resume cover letter introduces a potential employer to the best, most productive traits in an individual. Emily’s cover letter reflects this intention. By including the cover letter in this work, I endorse the statements she makes about herself. I verify that she told the truth about her abilities. The cover letter is an artefact depicting life before tragedy, when Emily had ambition to contribute to society. This is an artefact memorializing and lamenting what was once normal, even mundane. This poem, unlike her journal entry or the image of Emily on the logpile, is intentionally placed within the looping structure because it is meant to be read whether the reader is following the looping structure or reading linearly. The reader who follows the looping structure is not instructed to read the entire work. This is because while this reader falls into the pattern of insistence, they ruminate over what the re-encountering presents to them. The reader who experiences the work linearly sees the whole work, but does not fall into the same contextual trap of ruminating over single poems. The linear reader experiences every page, but they do not experience my disoriented perception of the world after my loss.

Palpable throughout my thesis is the presence of fragmented thought, expressed visually as poems with a single line or two. These are the most sensitive areas of my grief, and they represent my desire to share the grieving experience so as to relinquish some of the overwhelming isolation that plagues someone who has lost a loved one, but they also represent my inability to fully articulate my grief. More specifically, the fragments represent the grieving adult sibling, who is encouraged to continue on with everyday life, and silencing their sadness down to a faint moment of grief, a microscopic “little miss”. The fragmented expression reflects

an adult sibling trying to transform back into the person they were before the loss, but still displaying signs of grief. The societal expectations mixed with internalized anguish are emotionally and physically exhausting. I speak about this from my own experience. “Life’s too short,” an eighteen year old Emily writes, “to wait around for something or someone” (*A Little Miss* 25). In words that so aptly remark on self-discipline and forgiveness of self, she also touches upon the expectations placed on people. In the realm of grief that has been generated because of her death, her advice can be directed toward both the siblings who grieve and the people they interact with. Her advice for those who grieve can be interpreted as encouragement to feel and function to their best possible ability. To those who stand outside of the immediate grieving circle, she may be interpreted as prompting them to do their best to encourage others. Her advice is universal and the interpretation is endless. The reader is invited to use her journal entry to visualize her as a real, sentient person, and so she transforms from an internal rumination to a once living entity.

The clashes between the internal and external realms of processing loss are seen within the stages of grief outlined by Kübler-Ross: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross). While a grieving sibling, or anyone who grieves for that matter, faces these stages of grief, they occur in a non-linear manner, and the stages at any precise time may be difficult to distinguish. When “I’m trying to be one of you, even though I never wanted to be before,” (*A Little Miss* 11 line 8) is stated, I am acknowledging my isolation after grief. With my attempt to assimilate back into society, I face the harsh world that I denied existed before. Not only is my grief over Emily, but over the change to my perception of my surroundings. My realization that she is gone and that I must adapt socially in a world without her is an example of overcoming my denial. I previously denied that by functioning as I did before her death, my

daily life could still be the same, as “denial functions as a buffer after unexpected shocking news, allows the patient to collect himself and, with time, mobilize other, less radical defenses” (Kübler-Ross 35). I was trying to function with something irreparably broken, and rather than deny all that was shattered, I had to learn how to restructure my life, now without Emily. The poem “I Was A Star Child Once” (*A Little Miss* 7) shows an attempt to accept death as a reality, but it also implies a previous wilful ignorance of the world before Emily’s death. Loud noises existed before she passed away, but it was only after the trauma of her sudden death that they began to distress me. I did not consider loud noises to connect to danger until I received the guarantee of my own mortality.

Anger is another recurring presence in my thesis. Anger accompanies my sorrow, and they are both very strong emotions, and difficult to control after facing personal loss. It is hard to differentiate grief from anger when these emotions complement each other so well, and so “Grief, when I write it down, sounds angry,” (*A Little Miss* 86 line 1). The projection of emotions onto the undeserving occurs when other outlets feel unavailable. I’m reminded daily of the positive experiences I will not be able to share with Emily, and those reminders invoke anger. The trigger of anger while grieving is attached to the balancing of a new perceived order of the world. Through loss, I was reminded of the notion that incredible joy would be met with incredible pain: “What else would we do with our anger, but let it out on the people who are most likely to enjoy all these things” (Kübler-Ross 45) should they avoid or escape the painful aspects of life while I am often in emotional anguish. With the joys I have experienced, I have also experienced immense pain, and with that pain, the loss of security and feeling of control. In moments of frustration and intense emotion, that anger translates to panic as I realize I cannot control or change the tragedy I have faced. That vulnerability isolates me from people who still

exude an appearance of security. This is where my internal structure dissipates during the grieving process; in the event of suddenly losing a loved one, I am challenged to activate coping mechanisms I had not anticipated seriously enough to develop previously.

A coping mechanism that in my experience is tied to denial is bargaining. In Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*, she laments her husband John's obituary being published, because it means she had "allowed other people to think he was dead. [She] had allowed him to be buried alive" (Didion 35) in the eye of the public, as well as on paper. Didion's bargain is that she will refrain from printing the news in exchange for the news being untrue. The concept of holding back grief in the presence of others is not only a means of protecting one's privacy, but also a means of preserving the person who has died physically, so they may live in the perception of the individual grieving. This concept of bargaining for some semblance of life in the deceased is present when I confirm that I am like everyone else in society so that my humility might undo Emily's death. I have given up my self-proclaimed status as a star child to bargain for her life: "I learned my lesson. Please let me have her back now." (*A Little Miss* 7 line 10). This magical thinking is a denial of reality, and so two stages of grief collide, demonstrating a moment of non-linearity within one single poem.

The most identifiable stage in the process of my grief is depression. Depression as a stage of grief is a seemingly obvious and direct response to loss. However, it has a wide range of cloaks to wear every day. In "I Made Glass Bend, Apologies" (*A Little Miss* 17), I resent the notion of moving on with life after Emily's death. Particularly in the early stages of grief, one does not want to anticipate a new day, because with that new day comes the comprehension of a completely different mode of living. I am no longer living with a teenager, and this is not because she grew older or moved away for school. Those experiences were stripped from her at

the time of her death. This realization is a form of acceptance that death has occurred and is a reality, and so again two stages of grief combine. A misconception about depression, and even sadness if it is allowed as a broader term, is that it is something to be fixed:

Our initial reaction to sad people is usually to try to cheer them up, to tell them not to look at things so grimly or so hopelessly. We encourage them to look at the bright side of life, at all of the colorful, positive things around them. This is often an expression of our own needs, our own inability to tolerate a long face over any extended period of time (Kübler-Ross 76-77).

With an outsider's attempt to negate the sadness, a grieving individual is conditioned to believe that their depression is unsightly and a burden. Unfortunately the individual's repression of grief may lead to a wide range of negative effects, depending on the grieving individual. The looping structure of my work reflects the constant struggle between expressing grief and diverting to a new topic so that the mourner appears able to function without negative emotion, therefore seeming stronger. However, with the unpredictability of recursive thought, the grieving individual cannot always escape feeling and expressing their pain. Even within the stages that come and go, there is no linear predictability because every grieving experience is different. The inability to articulate one's emotions because of these social reservations makes an acceptance of the death a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Acceptance is a stage of grief that is often perceived as a means to an end of suffering. An outside bystander may consider a grieving individual's acceptance of the tragic reality a necessary unveiling. Unfortunately for an adult sibling, that is but a belittling of their wits. I understand death. A teenage death is absurd but also not impossible. It can be argued that for some who grieve, reality is so present at all times that it is too heavy a burden for outsiders to



bear. It is hopeful, or magical, thinking to believe that acceptance is a happy stage, as “acceptance should not be mistaken for a happy stage. It is almost void of feelings” (Kübler-Ross 100). It is a numbing state that allows for moments of calm for those who witness the grieving process. Those who did not know the deceased as well or are not directly affected by the death do not always understand that acceptance is not permanent in the grieving process.

As someone who has lost a loved one, these stages exist and are acknowledged by me. Although I am aware that there are various studies and theories surrounding the topic of grief that could be applied to my personal experience, Kübler-Ross and her five stages became a crutch to lean on. I was aware of the five stages before the death of my sister and so I found myself enlisting in them for a guideline when Emily passed away. My grief, guided by these five grieving stages, functioned as plateaus for mapping out my healing process, a process that approached each plateau several times, in varied order. My poetry within this collection is an account of my own grieving process, the process of someone who has faced the loss of a close family member and whose everyday life is changed because of the death. However, for outsiders who did not know the deceased but interact with the grieving individual, their contribution to grief is in response to death. Regardless of personal or direct contact with the deceased, everyone grieves over the loss, but the magnitude or pattern of grief is varied. It is this belief in universal grief that incites me to develop the structure for this creative work. The looping structure of this work reveals the fiction of linear stages of grief. We cannot expect an order between birth and death to follow the same path for every person, and so we cannot expect an order for loss to affect any two individuals the same. The existence we comprehend features a birth as the beginning and a death as the end. We also must be aware that we cannot truly comprehend the uncertain path that takes us from birth to death.

The dual images of the logpile (*A Little Miss* 1 and 94) imply a death at the beginning and an arrival at the end. Even what is certain about beginnings and endings is dependent on linear perception. The connections within *A Little Miss* exist when the reader takes on an interactive role in this thesis, and their choice in how they read this work reflects my relationship with them. The reader is also introduced to Emily, who is only familiar to them through me. Throughout the creative work the reader is reminded that the poems are about my relationship with my sister Emily. The reader is inclined to believe most of the poems are a conversation or lamentation about Emily. However, that duality is not the only one existing in *A Little Miss*. There also exists a version of Emily that is not Emily herself but my memory of her. This, of course, is a product of my own mind, and therefore a duality within my own inner ruminations and my external expression of grief. The dualities the reader sees in this work are dependent on their unique path through the pages, and their individual comprehension of the content of those pages. The poem “I Am A Choice” (*A Little Miss* 65) acknowledges the multi-layered meaning of the words “I” and “we” to such an extent that the lack of evidence of any second participant in the conversation leads the reader to infer that the cat had possibly defecated in my own shoes, instead of my sister’s. The ambiguity is intentional, and though the shoes are in fact Emily’s, the question arises whether the shoes have become my shoes after her death. It is here that the reality is so overwhelming that the reader is unsure if the last sentence of this poem merely ended the poem or also ended the intentions for a productive day for the grieving individual. Not only is the ownership of the shoes ambiguous, but it replicates the uncertainty of who the speaker is directing the “we” to. Is it an internal version of oneself that is telling its body there will be no coffee today? Is it a big sister talking to a little sister? If what is left for the big sister is but a memory of the little sister, couldn’t both theories be true? The poem “You Tend To Lose Your

Eyes When You Smile” (*A Little Miss* 4) is one line, and mirrors the inner connection between sisters to the outer connection: “people say we look alike” (*A Little Miss* 4) is a statement that implies Emily’s expression of happiness is similar to mine, a response to the title that notes someone’s eyes close when they form a smile, but is this “you” person me or Emily?

The question of whether the “you” is myself or Emily should be asked with the poem below the image of the empty logpile (*A Little Miss* 1). The poem functions as an instructional note for the reader, explaining that they may follow the options provided in the looping structure or they may read the work linearly. The tone is gentle and comforting, encouraging the reader to be forgiving of themselves for the choices they make in reading this text. The last line invites the reader to recognize the speaker as “big sister” which is intended to solidify a feeling of security and familiarity. The poem at the end of the creative work that accompanies the image of Emily on the logpile (*A Little Miss* 94) is an inversion of the instructional poem. Emily’s picture on this page allows for the interpretation that these are her words to her big sister. The tone of this poem is similar to the tone of her journal entry that occurs outside of the looping structure throughout the work. Here is a confirmation that within all of the most painful moments of grief, and all of the constant ruminations of this work, Emily has been present within the mind of her big sister, and the reader is invited to witness and celebrate that enduring connection.

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### **Vita Auctoris**

Priscilla Bernauer was born in Windsor, Ontario, in 1990. She has a Bachelors of English and Creative Writing (Honours), a Bachelors of Education, and an upcoming Masters of English and Creative Writing, each from the University of Windsor.