

## Scholastic National Gold Medal in Poetry (2012)

### **To Lily**

With your dreams in arcs above your head, you said  
Oh how I wish, and I could only breathe and watch you  
Even reasons against your tears, as you sit  
Lithe and cross-legged, fairy bones scooped against your skin.  
It was then that I felt it, the longing, and did I mention it was glorious.

But then I guess it would have to be, wouldn't it.  
How could I? When you are so lovely, you  
Laughter bubbling tumbles through softly slipping rivers  
Golden, notched into the corner of your mouth.  
How could I have what you want?

Do you know what it's like, you choke  
To let them get the best of you every single day?  
And the answer is  
Not something you would like to hear.  
I'll just sit quiet and make things a little easier.

It's the best I can do for you, you, with your  
Fancies sweet as swaying grain, blanket scrubbed scrappy raw  
And your simple fixes.  
Pushed down you get right back up again and isn't that  
Always the way it goes, honey. What would you rather have?  
You got off so easy, didn't you.

Make it simple make it hurt less with a loud mouth and a Band-Aid and  
don't ever think  
I don't know what you fear. And the answer is  
Me. So for several seconds there I watched you sway  
Over what you thought was oblivion, but, sugar, test the waters and  
you'll see  
It's only inches deep.

That must be better than you guessed.

So do I know what it's like? No.

To dance upon legs loping mile-long grace

To sink so hard into a story you don't hear your mother calling

To kiss purely and anxiously and only for a moment.

To still believe in magic. Oh. How I wish.

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## Cake

"It's only a cake," said she

So quietly to me.

A slight of light came to escape from the shade

(gray, third from the left, fifth floor, west wing)

The one with the missing blind and the broken clasp.

Only the corner of her eye and the corner of her mouth, and one freckle,  
were illuminated;

Darkness had snipped away at the rest of her face.

"You can eat it, if you'd like."

She had been to a bad party the night before, I could see its dank, acidic  
filtrate in the

space between her cheekbones and her lashes.

The skin there was the same blue as the icing.

"Why do you care so much?" outloud, I questioned

(it must be said that her answer would merely be my diversion)

"Because," she muttered, and left it at that.

There was a pause in which I attempted to stare her down

(but at this point, I was far too weary to appear threatening.)

Her sigh was sea skimming sand.

"What number cake is this?"

(of course, I could have answered, but I chose to stay silent.)  
And again she sighed, fingers thrumming like rum spilling slow amber  
across the floor.

They echoed thinly along the blanket.

It was the kind that never keeps you quite warm, the kind they use in  
hospitals.

“Please, Gabriel. Just eat it. Be happy.”

Well, it was a hospital, really. She knew it too;

That particular hue of vain pity in her voice was elusive, slight as her  
frame, but I managed

unearth it without much effort at all.

Years of practice.

“Happy,” I said to her

(as I spoke, I preferred to think that my voice had some sort of bitter,  
cutting effect on her, though this was probably not the case)

“And what do you mean by that? It’s a funny word, isn’t it?”

She chose to stay silent. I could not blame her.

I did not think she was trying her best.

“Hannah.” I said, softer this time.

Her eyes had been downcast, but in one sharp, fluid motion they flicked  
up, twanging

through me like that particular sort of day when the sky is gray but the  
sun still manages to burn.

It was not just their color that I likened to glaciers,

The underbelly, the netted lunar cold.

When I started to speak, she cut across me. “Look, Gabe. I didn’t come  
here for this. I made you the goddamned cake. Don’t give me this crap. I  
would love to be you. Anyone would.”

I said nothing, and once again her sigh rinsed the room a clean, light  
blue.

“The candles don’t fit, Gabe. I don’t even remember how many there are

supposed to be  
anymore. This thing  
    (and how blunt her voice struck me when she said this)  
is a blessing. You need to start treating it like one.”  
I looked at her; at that moment it was clear she was here out of  
obligation.

The way she moved suggested an unspeakable amount of intolerance  
and stress, frothing slick and viscous through her joints.

When she spoke, it made me sick:

“I try to come here, Gabe, I really do. But it’s so...revolting to watch -  
you don’t even open the  
shades, for christsake, they’re broken, look there! - do you know how  
insane it is for you  
to not be happy?”

How ignorant you are, I thought, how selfish.

As if she heard me, the lovely topography of her face snatched into rage  
    (and it almost enhanced the finery of her features, I noted; wrath  
became her.)

She swiftly lifted herself from the chair with an acutely ethereal grace.

Hannah, I thought, wait.

But that time she did not hear me, and the hall light spiked her silhouette  
into spindles and she  
left without looking back.

It took me a moment to notice that she had left the cake behind; it  
certainly was her hue of blue.

I stared at it for a very long time. Knocked it to the floor in a harsh,  
sweet flash.

I did not care for Hannah. I may have even hated her. It was simply nice  
to think she cared for me.

But if she wants to come back in twenty, sixty, eighty years, or on her  
deathbed, perhaps, I’ll be here,

Exactly as she left me.