Our Numbered Days

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*The best way to get to heaven is to take it with you.*
  Henry Drummond

*Heaven isn’t a place, it’s a feeling.*
  Sierra DeMulder

*Heaven will be no heaven to me if I do not meet my wife there.*
  Andrew Jackson

*In many languages, the word for heaven is the same as the word for sky.*
  Wikipedia

*I will sing to you all the things I stopped myself from saying while we were alive.*
  the author

*All the way to heaven is heaven.*
  St. Catherine of Siena

*I hope the exit is joyful and I hope never to return.*
  Frida Kahlo

*The light dimmed, and the singing in his head stopped.*
  Louise Erdrich

When my mother dies, I will lead her like a dog into the space between our walls which is just like the space between here and always, the king and the kingdom. I will lead her by the hand if she be blind and I will wag my tail against her knees if she be afraid and I will leave her at the gate.

Life on earth will in some ways be easier. I will not have to return her phone calls. I will not have to feel guilty when I want to hear no more no more about the divorce. I won’t cry
though I will want to cry. Though I will hate myself for not crying. When my mother dies, if I am still alive, I will slouch on my knees as though in prayer, I will write one or two poems, then I will no longer think of her.
Ballad of the Bruised Lung

Many things happen in your life that shouldn’t: the black spot that grew into cancer, the sub compact that just could not wait to meet you; maybe things do happen for a reason but that reason is stupid. Maybe your brother fell out of a window only because he’s an asshole. I love you, but I can’t keep letting you show up where I am and remind me of what I said to you all those times.

I was drunk that one time. Most of them were just hurtful nonsense, but I am proud of “You are like a comet: every so often you come around to fuck up my shit.” In a perfect world, all the towns in Illinois would be named “Blood” so I could no longer pick out yours on a map. When you’re dumb enough for long enough, you’re gonna meet someone too smart to love you, and they’re gonna love you anyway, and it’s gonna go so poorly. It must be odd for our mutual friends who like me more but think you were right. To say I hate you would imply a world in which I kissed more than your stomach. Look, we’ve established that I’m a jerk, so let me say this: I am a flat tire and you are a pothole full of lug nuts.

I am a pile of bricks and you are holding a sledgehammer, which is to say I would not exist without you.
Joey always told me, laughing, as though it were actually a joke, that he wanted to kill himself but it was never the right time. There were always groceries to be bought and little brothers to be tucked in at night. Don’t worry.

Joey isn’t going to kill himself twenty more lines into this poem. That’s not the kind of story I’m telling here.

Joey got a promotion and now he can afford Prozac. Joey is Joe now. Joe is a cold engine in which none of the parts complain. Joe is a brick someone made out of fossils. If you removed money from the equation, Joey would have been painting elk on cave walls. People would have fed him and kept him away from high places because goddamn, look at those elk. I think that the genes for being an artist and mentally ill aren’t just related, they are the same gene, but try telling that to a bill collector.

We were 17, and I drove us all to punk shows in a station wagon older than any of us. We were 17 and I bought lunch for Joey more often than I didn’t. We were 17 and the one time Joey tried to talk to me about being depressed when someone else was around, I told him to shut the hell up and asked if he needed to change his tampon. You know that moment when the cartoon realizes he’s taken three steps off the cliff
and he takes a long look at the audience like we are carrying the last moving box out of a half-empty house? Joey looked like that

without the puff of smoke. He just played video games for a half hour and then went home. Once I found Joey in my dad’s office, staring at the safe where he knew we kept the guns. Once Joey molded his car into the shape of a tree trunk and refused to give a reason why. I once caught Joey in Biology class staring at his scalpel like he wanted to be the frog, splayed out, wide open, so honest. There’s one difference between me and Joey. When we got arrested, bail money was waiting for me at the station. When I was hungry, I ate. When I wanted to open myself up and see if there really were bees rattling around in there, my parents got me a therapist. I can pinpoint the session that brought me back to the world. That session cost seventy-five dollars. Seventy-five dollars is two weeks of groceries. It’s a month of bus fare.

It’s not even a school year’s worth of new shoes. It took weeks of seventy-five dollars to get to the one that saved my life. We both had parents that believed us when we said we weren’t ok, but mine could afford to do something about it. I wonder how many kids like Joey wanted to die and were unlucky enough to actually pull it off. How many of those kids had someone who cared about them but also had to pay rent? I’m so lucky that right now

I’m not describing Joey’s funeral. I’m so lucky we all lived through who we were to become who we are. I’m so lucky I’m so—lucky.