

## Cough Drop

For Ian, who wrote a poem and a mindvomit and tagged me. I can't write poetry but I can write this, Ian, whatever this is. Also I can't stop coughing. Apparently there is a thing when you are dying of consumption, a euphoria right before you kick it, you get sexy and creative, and it's called the

## Hope of the Consumptive

I've been talking to this stink bug on the desk. He says he knew me before I was sick.

I say, did I meet you on the 31st?

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I still have dreams that I don't know how to drive. Someone is ill, someone needs to go to the hospital, all the ambulances have bad starters, all the cabbies are occupied. But I can't drive. Alien pedals, manual gear shifts, the key goes where? The car rolls along like down a gentle slope while I steer it, while the steering wheel locks and I scream at the person next to me, the person next to me is not a person: a box of tissues, an insect, a lung filled with tomato seeds, a cup of hot broth.

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What the sinus is, it's like the servants' staircase. Air pockets in your skull filled with stale crackers and voice messages from your mother. But don't call her back, don't smoke cigarettes, don't cross the streams.

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Plastic wrapped in plastic. All right, all right, so it's a little blood! So what do you want me to do? Want me to pull a scarf out of your ear? Want me to call the landlord?

It's an honor, it's a curse: *all the stinkbugs in Baltimore have come here to die.*  
So this friend you've got, he's gone. Belly up, lungs out.

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I used this knife to cut open a grapefruit.  
I bought it at Wal-mart, for self-defense. The cashier was a petite Indian woman. She was a mother, I know, when she scanned the knife and shook her head.  
What do you need this for?  
I'm taking a roadtrip.  
Not by yourself, no?  
By myself.  
Mmm, be careful, she sang.

That's what the knife is for! I said. Too enthusiastic. I can never come back here.

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The trees in Howard County. The picture goes from horizontal to vertical. I'm at the bottom of the valley, but I could still be lost. There is nothing except the road and the trees and the river below, out of sight, but always there. Like an old dog asleep in the corner.

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Pull the boots, I don't know, I know. Don't I know it. You know? Quick: Express nap! She took everything. I never knew. It doesn't matter. Orange spice, isn't that nice. Keep it together. Get it together. No, no problem, I just had a deeply symbolic dream about us both. Shit, it don't matter. I'm being consumed from the inside out. Nothing is a waste. Everything is a waste. Don't you be a good one. If I knew how. Missing people is like a wool coat, my favorite hoodie, someone I never knew. That's how it goes, I think. Unless you know another way. Unless you have puppy dog eyes.

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He says I don't have consumption. How can anyone know. In the far reaches of the universe-- some crazy shit is happening. We won't hear about it for some time.