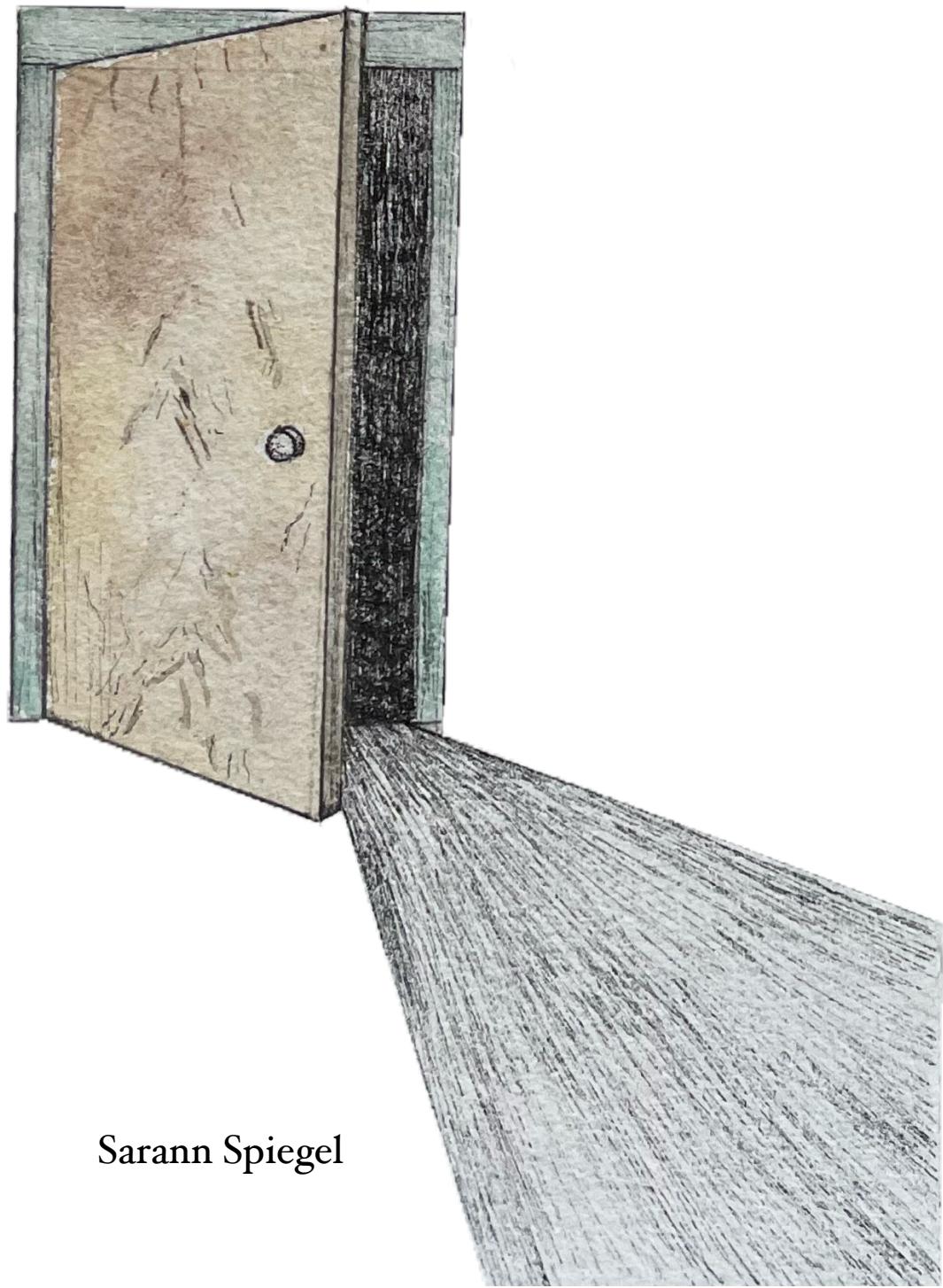


Fork Songs

& other poems from the
winter of my discontent



Sarann Spiegel

FORK SONGS
& other poems
from the winter
of my discontent

by Sarann Spiegel

*For Pasha,
who read these poems first, second,
third, and fourth. I love you.*

Thanks for everything.

All poems included were written and edited from November 2024 to January 2025 by Sarann Spiegel.

Cover artwork done by Pasha Zack and edited by Sarann Spiegel.

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Notes on the Poems

“But I remember you from before you became
a story.”

— *Marie Howe, “Gretel, from a sudden clearing”*

“They don’t
mistake the lover for their own pleasure,
they are like great runners — they know it is a matter of
the road surface, the cold, the wind,
the fit of their shoes, their overall cardio-
vascular health — just factors, like the partner
in the bed, and not the truth, which is
the single body alone in the universe
against its own best time.”

— *Sharon Olds, “Sex Without Love”*

intro

i never imagined myself
here, i tell them when they
ask. you're in trouble,
dad says. bodies like cold
air, sinking through smokestack
highs. pipe clatters against teeth
knock knock. we used to laugh.
oh, we used to laugh. are you
in trouble? you ask knowing full well
how open i lay. knockout. dead
at your side, deer-shaped
dent in the car, you drive off.

reading just kids

and they are up and down 23rd, where the ymca

used to be and i try to map it all
over childhood memories in which everything

was a tower and the rain was up to my knees.
on one of the emptiest streets in the city i try

to see backwards.
and then he is there

over my shoulder, muttering
try it this way, no, no, spin it, flip that

the other way, and he should be orpheus
with that guitar in his hands but i'm the one

turning. poet is a disposition. if looking back
is a killing blow, then, baby, we were dead

before we hit the ground. every day is a new chance
to turn. i knew how to live with him

at my back. i forgot
how to go without. the y is upside down

the building's on fire. boys scream bloody
murder, heads crushed hearts bleeding. and the thing is

the thing is, he will always be behind me
especially once he's gone.

P says it's like metamorphosis

but i'm a caterpillar from beginning
to end. i'm gonna try and write this one
like she would. Z says he was a drag
queen, briefly, and i'm stealing
that one too. poetic theft. i've started
to unpack my own wanting, immoderate
and unhealthy as it is, and halfway to empty
i discover a hidden compartment. another
hurt stored away like money found in
an old purse except it breaks
my heart. there's only so much you can let slide
before the land goes with it.
the house, the body, the spirit
wiped out. after it all goes
hands clasp and lips move in prayer. we ask god
for strength and answers, finding the former
without realizing and the latter, well
i'm still waiting to hear back about those.
maybe i'll never hear. i have a feeling i won't.
i dream of you and when i don't, i wake up
thinking of how i didn't. i can't win. this is a lose-lose
and i'm playing both sides. you were never a part
of this. i've been playing with myself the whole time.
caterpillar from beginning to end. a chrysalis

needs to crystallize, and the only solid thing
is the snow melting off awnings

Fork Songs

people keep telling me

they don't like sad songs.

no adrienne lenker, fionn regan, justin
vernon. no sufjan stevens or damien rice
and no elliott smith. an inexplicable fork
in the roads of our lives.

on the side of the road where live

-wires hang loose, angel hands, me

and you reach this mythical fork.

you state your case: you like songs

that take you up. i like to become one rice

grain among the million, tucked away, for safe-keeping. just in

case. we agree to disagree. there is something just in

-side your heart, even if my friends say otherwise. we live

on different sides of the world. whatever. it's all rice

in the grand scheme of things. me,

i don't care if we don't like the same songs.

i round the corner, move past the fork

and to our dinner rez. i don't know which fork
to use but you guide me through. just in-
ches away from forever, you resurrect the grand song
debate. your tangents lead me astray. once, i could live
along the winding roads, but was it living? you're caught up, not seeing me
sitting across from you, picking at grains of rice.

walking back, i recall the childhood game of holding rice
on our tongues all the way home. we pass the fork.
angels shower us in light. you and me
make a run for it, escape the sparks and our fate of fading. ash, just in-
cinerated. the road before us splits, de- and reconstructs live
so we walk a new way. too late, i realize maybe it was never about the songs.

my mother can't listen to your favorite band. their songs
recall unhappy childhoods, plates bare, only rice.
we pass all the places i used to live
and you hug me goodbye, forgo the customary kiss. the fork
widens and i watch you leave, heart wincing just in
time for the rain of fire. upstairs, it's me

myself and i. i put a sad song on, pull a fork
from the drawer. devour cold fried rice as justin
sings an old live track. i begin to fissure. i can't make you love me.

**interlude (an excerpt from my making my case to God, regarding
entry to the afterlife)**

it's not that there weren't good parts

Right.

there were good parts. really good parts. beautiful, even.

Of course.

i just

i don't know that i feel like sharing.

I've seen it.

you have?

Yes.

well

um

you having seen it is different than me telling it

Is it?

yes.

How

they're private. they were beautiful and they're mine. they're ours. mine and
I understand.
they're not yours. you shouldn't have been watching.

Excuse me.

Your excitement was infectious.

that's

good.

i'm glad.

iceberg

i like to imagine
us at the bar, sipping at rocks, trading
fun facts. yours star the ancients
mine star ships. we meet
at the titanic. named for wreckage
and ruination. i tell it like an epic, like
a love story. bites from neck to navel
she falls headfirst. goes haywire. body turns
off, everything a rush. it is here that you

interrupt

fantasy bending to your will like
i bent. and continue to. in the morning
you ask for a reason. God can't give you one
but i do, gasping for air. sunk.

“thought You were God. I thought You were my friend”

will we be like Bobby and Joan, tossing our desires
underhand in fourteen years time, peripheral

yet within arm’s reach? will I still be overanalyzing
a single gesture, every other dismissal rolling off

into the fog? moss ungathered. only
exchanging truths through poetry. sorry, Bobby,

but I’m tired. You don’t need to explain life to me; I’m living,
I’m familiar. I will remember Your ticker tape when

You’ve tossed that version of Yourself to the wind.
one morning, Your eyes closed, I

studied the heart in Your
throat, a mere vibration. I’ve never seen

anything so fragile as that constant thrum.
it was the last time I’ll be

that close — but maybe Joan said things like that
too, not knowing the messes to be made

further down the line. lover to brother,
because what are the songs if not

an excuse for closeness? touch without guidelines.
named for Plato but Eros lurks beneath, his wings

beating within Your flesh. I'd like to hold that in my hands.
soul quivering anxious under the skin. You

had Your blinders on. I've already paid and I'll keep paying
with every overaccessed memory 'til they're faded, dusty, original

long gone. it's all gone. records remain. oh
Bobby, the artist. the genius. this heartbreak

may be Your finest work yet. Your delicate hands
are written all over it.

ALL THE BEST VISIONS COME MID-STRIDE

i'm gonna be reborn

this winter. gonna reinvent
the wheel, come back subtly new, with

a brighter sparkle in my eye.

i'm breaking out of this shape

like divine intervention. forced, maybe, but not
unnatural — all born things are shoved

pushed, an agonizing squelch
followed by that desperate plea

for life. this january won't feel hollow
i'll fill it in, color the snow outside

the lines without thinking. i won't think
about you at all and you won't be there and

i'll go to the photo booth alone
and my smile'll be the only one

they need. i made you half of myself
but that half will be remade, skin fresh

spotless, softer than the press of your lips
to my forehead, softer than anything.

i'll sit and grin and the half i left with
you will curdle. we will be dead

and i'll be alive, alive and
the camera will catch me already slipping out

onto the next

outro

i will
miss the
half hung
lights and the
wench beneath
the blanket

and i
will miss the way
you sound
your mouth
right by my
ear. i run
a hand
along the jamb
press my fore
head to its lines

i will miss
when it was all
like this
and when i
didn't have
anything
else to
want.

knuckle knocks twice. goodbye
goodbye. i do not look back. i go

Notes on the Poems

Due to its many musical allusions, this chapbook takes the shape of a record; it contains a tracklist, an intro/outro, and an interlude.

The first musical allusion is in “reading just kids,” which is in conversation with Patti Smith’s memoir. Smith is a multimedia artist and performer who wrote the award-winning *Just Kids* about her close relationship with fellow artist Robert Mapplethorpe. This poem also references Orpheus and Eurydice, figures from Greek mythology. Orpheus was a bard who went to the Underworld to barter with the king to save his wife, Eurydice, and bring her back to the land of the living. Hades’ one requirement was that Eurydice’s soul follow Orpheus up the stairs and out of the Underworld — and Orpheus could not turn back to see if she was there. He must have total faith in her and their ascent. He managed to not turn for the entire journey, but at the last moment, he turned, and Eurydice was whisked away, back into eternal darkness.

“Fork Songs,” this chapbook’s titular poem, references many musicians (Adrienne Lenker of Big Thief, Justin Vernon of Bon Iver, Fionn Regan, Sufjan Stevens, Damien Rice, and Elliott Smith) and centers on the conflict of differing music tastes between two lovers. The final sentence, “i can’t make you love me,” is the title of a Bon Iver song released as a B-side to his single “Calgary” and as a live track on “Bon Iver, Bon Iver (10th Anniversary Edition).” This poem is a sestina.

The poem “thought You were God. I thought You were my friend” uses Bob Dylan and Joan Baez’s storied relationship as a framework to explore another. The title comes from a line in Joan Baez’s memoir, *And A Voice to Sing With*, which is referenced throughout the poem. Multiple allusions are made to songs in both artists’ discographies; “Like A Rolling Stone,” “Blowin’ in the Wind,” “O Brother!,” “Oh, Sister,” and “Diamonds and Rust,” to be specific.

“iceberg” does not contain any musical references, but frames a relationship with the sinking of the *RMS Titanic* in April 1912. The *Titanic* was named after the Greek Titans who were felled by Zeus and his pantheon. The ship was deemed “unsinkable” due to its ability to stay afloat even if four out of sixteen watertight compartments sustained damage. Five compartments were damaged by the iceberg’s slicing along the side of the ship. After the tragedy, sea travel safety guidelines were vastly improved.

Lastly, “outro” is intended to look like a lit cigarette.

Sarann Spiegel is a young poet and writer. Previous writings include the short collection *You Wrote Your Name in the Margins of My Heart*, as well as two novellas, *And Iron is Very Brittle* and *Baby Steps*. All three are available to read on their website (<https://yeahimadeawebsite.wordpress.com/>), along with other small pieces. They are a born and raised New Yorker who splits their time between the Big Apple and Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, where they study English Literature and Creative Writing. In their spare time they like to take long walks and laugh with loved ones.

poet is a disposition.

