Girl with Broken Car Sings

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GIRL WITH BROKEN CAR SINGS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
in
CREATIVE WRITING
by
Brianne Griffith

2021
To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Arts, Sciences, and Education

This thesis, written by Brianne Griffith, and entitled Girl with Broken Car Sings, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Campbell McGrath

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Vernon Dickson

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Denise Duhamel, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 11, 2021

The thesis of Brianne Griffith is approved.

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Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Arts, Sciences, and Education

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Andrés G. Gil  
Vice President for Research and Economic Development and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2021
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

GIRL WITH BROKEN CAR SINGS

by

Brianne Griffith

Florida International University, 2021

Miami, Florida

Professor Denise Duhamel, Major Professor

GIRL WITH BROKEN CAR SINGS is a full-length collection of free verse poems that explore an obsession with celebrity status, culture, and power; the speaker longs for and imagines new lives for herself, all the while examining the wickedness of American commercialism and capitalism through a reality TV lens.

Pop culture is also used as a vehicle to discuss familial trauma. The gaps in the speaker’s life are filled with mainstream media references. GIRL WITH BROKEN CAR SINGS considers how people engage with media to understand or “see” themselves in the world.

While there are no sections in GIRL WITH BROKEN CAR SINGS, the poems at the beginning mirror the poems at the end, leading readers to the middle poem: “4th Grade Reflections Awards, South Allegheny Elementary School, 2005.” The ordering of the poems makes space for imaginative leaps—movement between the real and surreal.
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Hotboxing My Car in a Denny’s Parking Lot

You know chapstick’s a scam? Ellie says,

& I just say yeah cause I really don’t care.

In the driver’s seat, heat blowing,
I imagine a wolf spider sitting at the bottom
of a stark white styrofoam cup.

I imagine Ariana Grande paying off my student loan debt
via Twitter DM, a squirrel

poppin out a tree hole
cause I can’t remember ever seeing
a tree hole.

I imagine a peanut butter jar full of maggots,
Ellie’s eyes as Etch-a-Sketches,
singing a duet with Cher,
only Cher becomes my mom
& my mom’s taking her bra off at the bar again.

I imagine my arm skin sliding
right off like cheese on hot pizza,

John Cena sipping soup from a wine glass

until Ellie says, Are we gonna go in? They might close,

but I say, Close? They’re open all night—that’s why we’re here.
If I Was Gordon Ramsay’s Daughter

6:30 a.m. & on the set of *Hell’s Kitchen*, I’m watching him punch
an undercooked filet of salmon while keeping his eyes on crying contestant Joe,
who was caught eating lobster risotto during dinner service.

But when we lock eyes across several kitchen countertops, his smile flashes
like a fridge light as I watch him whisk with gusto—I never knew
a wrist could move so fast

until my 7th birthday. He made hard boiled eggs for breakfast
because he knew I liked them, but he made 30. I only ate 2, so he said:
*C’mon, let’s go play ball outside.*

He let me go first—I grabbed an egg from his apron pocket,
swung my arm in circles like a crank & pitched the egg underhand.
He blasted it outta the park (over our gate)

& then I clasped my hands together like a baseball bat
& let him launch eggs at me, fastballs, I could barely keep up but be kept going
until every egg was hit. Now
I’m watching him gather 7 men into a corner, cameras rolling,

he’s yelling: *Have your brains been boiled?* He’s throwing scallops

like speedballs, he’s kicking everyone out of the kitchen, sweat’s dripping off his chin

like juice off a steak knife until he sees me again,

wipes his chin with his apron & says: *Hey kid, get over here—let me show you how to dice a carrot.*

He makes sure I’m fed, that I know how to feed myself. He thinks red velvet cake

is bullshit, but he always bakes one for my birthday. He remembers

my birthday, my name, when he sees me he knows

I’m his daughter. When I’m one bad day away

from sticking my hand in a blender, he always picks up the phone, even at work,

he says: *Stop the cameras you idiots,*

*it’s my daughter.*
Girl with Broken Car Sings

Backing out of my driveway, my car sounds like a warning, like rolls of thunder live in each wheel, like I’m one roll away from auditioning for Fast & Furious: “girl who explodes in car #2.”

I pull back into my driveway & sit & blast the A.C. until my arms feel as cold as steel bleachers.

I let the radio play through Lizzo’s Truth Hurts because she’s right: my car & spirit are broken, that’s the damn truth. I don’t know how much longer I can laugh shit off. Yesterday, my therapist said:

*When you’re about to say something bad about yourself,*

*why don’t you try singing it?* So I sing soprano:

*I’m an idiot with a broken car* like I’m auditioning for Fast & Furious: “girl who sings while credits are rolling.”

If I was just an extra in Fast & Furious I’d probably have enough money to fix my car.

They probably have enough cars on set to let me have one—I just looked up Vin Diesel,