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Girl with Broken Car Sings

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

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.

Campbell McGrath

Vernon Dickson

Denise Duhamel, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 11, 2021

The thesis of Brianne Griffith is approved.

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

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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
Hotboxing My Car in a Denny's Parking Lot	1
If I Was Gordon Ramsay's Daughter	3
Girl with Broken Car Sings	5
On Forgiveness	7
Watching Titanic on a First Date	10
Reading About the Murder of Jessica Chambers, December 2014 & On My 17th Birthday, I Ate Roadkill	13
I Found a Pregnancy Test in a CVS Bathroom	17
Young Barracuda	19
Brad Pitt Can Shove It	21
I Watch Bri Eat Cockroaches on Fear Factor	23
Woman Stops for Gas	25
Open Text to Michael Cera	27
When Ally Asks About My Dad, I Panic & Tell Her	29
Fighting With My Mom at TGI Fridays	31
for Andy, who I hope one day is swallowed by a whale	33
COMMERCIAL	35
On Surviving Loneliness	37
Finding Out About a High School Friend's Death on Facebook	39

I WANT TO FEEL REAL	41
I'm Behind On Work & This Is Why	43
My New TV Show	45
Laundry Day	47
Finishing Moves	48
My Mom's First Marriage	50
On Being Called a "Poser" at the Skatepark	52
Comet	54
Hard Boiled Egg as Magic 8 Ball	56
Watching David Blaine Through a Two-Way Mirror	58
4th Grade Reflections Awards, South Allegheny Elementary School, 2005	59
Nipple Picnic	61
Decorating My Forehead	63
SKATEBOARDING SESTINA	65
I would like to hear one of your stories	68
What If We Kissed	70
GLITCH	72
Marketplace	74
My Hand is an Outlet	77
Sara & I Fuck Up the Bathroom at Jekyll & Hyde	80
Really Smart Things To Do The Next Time You Move	82

Dear Body, Let Me Explain:	84
I Was Partying When You Died	85
My love is transformative like Anne Hathaway in The Princess Diaries	86
What I Would Tell Myself in 2010	87
When my mom asks why I'm still single	89
Goodbye Sonnet to the Men Who've Tried to Kill Me	90
INFOMERCIAL	91
Ellen DeGeneres's Box of Shit	93
Portrait of My Mother in Blue	95
Waiting at Women & Teens Healthcare, Hallandale Beach	97
Getting High at PVAA Baseball Field	99
Unsent Letter to Kurt, After a Friend's Suicide Attempt	101
Cleveland Clinic's Third Face Transplant Katie Stubblefield	103
Von Bought Me a "Grow a Cowboy" in Portland, OR	105
Another Poem about Forgiveness	107
Ode to My Annoying Laugh	109
Mac Miller Wants You to Know He's OK	110
Self-Portrait as Troy Bolton	112
Loitering	113

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 he 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,