I've lost most of my voice.

Tiny fragments of it,
Tossed away and dropped and slid over to someone else,
Eroding away until it's unrecognizable.

My voice was never really mine.

It's never *supposed* to just be mine.

I took my nails to my soul
And clawed a piece out,
Turned it to ink to pen a letter,
Sealed it up and passed it over the girl across the room.

I replaced a roll of film with a coiled up piece of my heart,
Standing on the porch until my bare feet were numb,
Fumbling, frozen fingers on a camera
A lens never good enough to compress the moon and stars into pixels,

Tore up my body, breaking and bending bones,
Running after the others across the concrete
So out of breath we could not even laugh
As we tripped and stumbled over shoes we never tied.

I took the tattered remains of my voice,
Put them through my father's shredder,
Lifted the destroyed ribbons out, tossed them up in the air,
Laid on the hardwood and let them fall down to earth, settle onto my old-young skin.

Picked one up, to find it was not my own.
It had warped and twisted
to fit in the cavity in my throat,
But it was not anything I had ever made.

It had long since seeped into an empty place,
Patching up a hole I didn't know i had,
Pulling the exposed parts together
And closing up like a flower bud.

It was the color of that girl's eyes,
The tinge of her hair, her lips,
The vibrant shade she painted her nails,
The exact hue of the ink that she replied with.

It was the color of the moon,
Shining silver with deepened, round craters,
staring down at me and staying still,
Lending me and my camera just one more night.

It was the color of the scuffed toe of my shoes,
The old pavement, the faded curb,
The tint of the old tetherball and rusted pole,
The pigment of our scraped knees and our tears.

You ask me to show you my voice,
But I have nothing to show but a thousand echoes.
Pieces I have traded, my heart my soul my body,
A reflection that doesn't completely belong to me.

Because what is that, if not my voice?

How can my voice be anything other than that girl,
Whispers she passes from her lips to mine,
Our hearts so close in time,
Beating to crack my ribs, cut down to the bone

Young enough to know about heaven,
But old enough to know that there was nothing for us there
That we could not find down here, passing notes in pink ink,
The perfect age to ask *what was salvation compared to love?*

What is my voice, if not screaming that?

How can it be anything other than what my mother says
Chiding me when I come in from the cold,
Shoving a pair of shoes at me and telling me to get my jacket,
A frown on her face but all-consuming care in her eyes,

When I'm the reflection of all she ever was and she is all I might be,

My legs creaking under the weight of my mother,
Her love, her expectations, her wishes and her hopes
For the daughter she has formed.

What is my voice, if not telling her goodnight?

How can my voice be anything other than how my friends laughed,
Some growing apart but our roots forever side-by-side,
Stretching out under an oblivious hope
Laying in the grass on a sweltering summer day,

Childhood was a wish to be anywhere else, to stay where I was.
How it lingered, the taste of hot chocolate that took hours to make,
How Christmas eve and day were an eon apart, how a stick was a sword
and a cul-de-sac, a fortress that lasted an age.

What is my voice, if not the laughter tore out of my too-small body under the high sun?

You ask for me to show you my voice,
And I scrape mine up, mixed and combined and braided
With a thousand others,
Because what is my voice if not me?

And what am I if not a collection of scraps?
The raw urge to not be great, but to be loved?
My voice is changing, losing and gaining,
Abandoning and recovering my past self,
Assembling my future, unscrambling my present.

My voice cannot be put into a poem.
I cannot tell you my voice,
Because it does not exist.

I cannot tell you who I am
Without telling you who everyone else is.

And by tomorrow, my voice will be scrapped,
A new layer pasted overtop, by the kind stranger,
The old friend,
the lost chance.

My voice is these people,
Changing every time I breathe,
Every time my heart lets itself beat.

By tomorrow, my old voice is dead,
And I will be so *alive.*