

Cherry Pop-Tarts®

Heather McNaugher

I decide this will be it, my last pop-tart, cherry,
as I stand at the circ desk of the college library
and tear up your number
which I had written on a Post-it®, Hello Kitty®,
and then stuck to my ID.
The computer says I love you I owe 29 dollars
for Frank O'Hara and that thesaurus
I borrowed when I taught the class
how to find a synonym. I'm sorry. Hello Kitty's ears
are burning—so tiny, so pink,
and so I pulverize them.
My students are 20; when I say Roget's
they look at me like I'm not here; they don't know yet
the way to say nothing articulately
is backwards. You called it—said *if we . . . then we*
have something that has to end
immediately. There is nowhere,
no receptacle bottomless enough in which to heave
the irreversible doll-petals, and so I stand here, a giant cramping thumb
and forefinger, handing over all my money.
I would very much like to leave you
here in the library with my fine, but am forced
to take you with me for, so help me God,
the last time. A single urgent dollar is all I've got;
I walk into the snack bar like I need a shot
and a beer, "Cherry pop-tart please." The bartender
reads a thick thriller with a weary spine,
doesn't look up till she's finished her last line—
says, "Looks like you got the last one"—keeps reading.
Into the crematorium toaster I drop them,
the pop-tarts too, and stand at the condiment bar

with its inconvenience and awkward intimacy
and everyone's so fucking insipid
no one good-looking ever sidles up
for half and half and says, "Marry me."
In the stillness of waiting
for my pop-tart to pop, a state of emergency, I have three minutes
to add to the list of things I'll stop
doing tomorrow: Pop-tarts, calling Megan C.,
returning my books late, setting small fires indoors—
incidentally the last four acts I've performed.
Always it starts with pastry—21 years of *I'll stop
tomorrow*, augmented by, at 14,
some uncommitted vomiting.
I met you 21 years ago. I was 14—a bad look for anyone,
much less a four-eyed half-assed-bulimic lesbian.
No wonder you wrote me that letter
flashing the knife *friends*, under which heading
our options are: *acquaintance*, *chum*, *intimate* (a noun)
and, my favorite—*other self*,
with its codependent grandiosity. Fuck you.
I keep meaning to stop substituting
cherry pop-tarts for shots and beers. But first, before things
get out of hand, I yell over to the girl at the counter, "Good for you."
She's 20. She looks at me. Through the smoke, I'm not here—louder,
"Good for you for reading a book," for finding the thing
that won't catch on fire, then disappear.