

# OXFORD GIRL

BY MEGAN ABBOTT

*Oxford*

*I fell in love with an Oxford girl  
With dark and darling eyes.  
I asked her if she'd marry me,  
And me she nothing denied.\**

**T**wo a.m., you slid one of your Kappa Sig T-shirts over my head, fluorescent green XXL with a bleach stain on the right shoulder blade, soft and smelling like old sheets.

I feigned sleep, your big brother Keith snoring lustily across the room, and you, arms clutched about me until the sun started to squeak behind the Rebels pennant across the window. Watching the hump of your Adam's apple, I tried to will you to wake up.

But I couldn't wait forever, due for first shift at the Inn. Who else would stir those big tanks of grits for the game-weekend early arrivals, parents and grandparents, all manner of snowy-haired alumni in searing red swarming into the café for their continental-plus, six thirty sharp?

So I left you, your head sunk deep in your pillow, and ducked out still wearing your shirt. Wore it hustling across the Grove, my legs bare and goosy in last night's party skirt, the zipper stuck.

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\* *"The Oxford Girl" is an English ballad with multiple lyrical variations dating back at least to the 1820s and possibly as far as the seventeenth century. This version comes from the John Quincy Wolf Folklore Collection at Lyon College.*

I wore your shirt, frat boy, because it was stiff and warm and smelled like you, your bed, you.

I wore it all day Friday, to my midterm and to gen chem lab and to Walgreens and Holli's Sweet Tooth to pick up the cookies for tomorrow's tailgate.

That evening, head in my calc text, I fell asleep at my desk still wearing it, page crease on my cheek.

So of course I was still wearing it when you woke me up, coming on eleven o'clock, you drunk and heated up on something, everything.

You had a funny look in your eye I'd not seen before and I thought, *Does he know?* But you couldn't have.

I'd only learned myself a few hours before, the Walgreens bag hidden in my trash.

The baby inside me was far smaller than a pinhead, the Internet told me.

Did you feel it, though, somehow—can boys?—when you hoisted me on the sinktop in the Kappa Sig bathroom the night before, your hands on my belly? Your fingers were five thumbs like hot dogs but you were strong, strong as my dad swinging a bat in our backyard in Batesville, saying, *My girl, my girl, she's going to the U, all. That's my pride and joy. She aims proud and true.*

Someone as strong as you couldn't feel something as small as a pinhead, could you?

But is that why you did me, because of the baby you put inside me?

It wasn't even a baby yet, except maybe to God.

Didn't you know I would fix it. I had dreams too.

Bigger dreams than you, frat.



The first time I saw you was at church, and it was fate because I

hadn't been since Easter. Your face stuck out among all the others. It was like I knew you, girl.

It wasn't until later I figured out where I'd seen you before: in the painting hanging on the wall of my grandmother's house. A smudgy rendering of a petticoated country girl feeding a baby calf with a bottle. It was on her wall my whole life, right above the table with the phone you had to dial, and the girl was so beautiful, with light on her face.

You had that light on your face.

The next day, I saw you again. You were gliding up the library steps at seven a.m., just as I was slouching home. One of those mornings I'd been sneaking fast through some girl's pink-foiled door—the entire door covered in wrapping paper, that's a thing some girls do, the door also dripping with things, Mardi Gras beads, a message board with a frilly pen hanging from it. So many things, so that when you snuck out just as the sky was shaking night off you couldn't help but wake that girl, the cinnamon blast of last night's fireball from her open sleep-mouth.

Even after I escaped the sweet cream whip of a bed, wriggling free by sliding out from her arm hooked around my neck, wrist pinned to my thigh, that booby-trapped door still told on me. The clatter-click shimmy-slap of that gimcrack door, waking all the girls on the hall, their topknots sliding from sleeping heads.

These girls, they were all like candy, sweet 'n' sour.

My mouth, my gut, coated with it. With them.

But you were different. I could tell.

Your heart, pure as a girl in a dream—that's what I knew, just from looking at you. You in the faded pasteled picture in my grandma's house, that baby calf near purring with delight, head nestled on your soft bosoms.

Your heart pure and your body barely touched, never said a curse and bet you ironed your bedsheets just like my grandma

too. She told me that boys were meant to misbehave and it was for a good girl to save us boys, each and every one.

You were that girl.



“Don’t drink anything served out of a trash can.”

That’s what my big sisters told me before the party.

“Which will be a change from Batesville,” one of them added, winking mean at me.

I was the only Batesville Chi O. Mom had the plan long ago, all those weekends I spent babysitting for her boss at South Panola Veterinary, Dr. JoAnn Kitts, who also happened to be president of the local Chi O alum chapter.

*Once she knows you, Mom said, she will love you, everyone does, and then you’ll get your bid and you’ll live in that big house white as coconut cake with such grand pillars.*

After I pledged she had me take pictures of her standing on the porch wearing her *Proud Chi O Mom* sweatshirt, waving and waving under the sky-high pillars.

At the party, there was no trash can I could see, only the sunshine punch in the plastic bowl made to look like crystal.

Do you know it was you who served us first, me and my Chi O sister Briane, giving us two plastic cups apiece, saying to me, *Pretty gals shouldn’t have to wait twice?*

The music was shaking through us and the punch tasted like Country Time, but I saw the jugs of Everclear behind you.

Soon, we were dancing. Time shook us free and our bodies leapt and writhed for hours.

*Chi-O, my ho, it’s off to bed we go*, some of you boys were singing. Were you one of them?

Midnight struck with Briane puking great golden gushes on my shoes in the bathroom.

In the tight stall, she cried hot shudders against me and told

me all about you. *Did you see the boy who gave us the cups?* she sobbed, sputtering. Then saying she couldn't believe you didn't recognize her because you had loved her one weekend last spring. How she met you in this very house for a boots-and-bowties mixer and after many vodka sodas you took her on the roof and persuaded her with such honeyed words to dip her dainty duckling neck into your lap and gave you everything her little motor mouth could. Later, she passed out in your room and in the morning you were gone but left her a half-full bottle of Gatorade and an empty trash can in case.

Which she thought was sweet.

But she was a Jackson girl, and what did she know of love?

Her breath sweet and rank in my ear, she confided that, the next day and the next, she texted you and texted you—dirty things she thought you might like, and romantic thoughts too because you'd told her the night you two met, her head resting wearily in your lap after her task, her mouth suffused with your love: *You are my girl, aren't you?* you'd said. *Ah, you are, hot thing.*

You never texted her back, not even when she sent you that picture of her *Chi-O-My!* thong twirled around one sparkly fingernail.

When Monday came—or so she told me, her gritty teeth clicking in postvomit chill—she walked into the student union, the air thick with the sour yeast from the Subway's ovens gusting through the pipes, and saw you sprawled across one of the crusted lounge sofas with a ponytailed girl in shearling boots and the shortest of MissBehavin pom shorts and probably hailing from Texas. Oh, how she wriggled and cuddled against your Kappa Sig shirt, the same one against which Briane had pressed her cheek two days before, doing your business for you in your frat boy lap.

That was all there really was to Briane's sad story except for a dry heave or two. So I cleaned her face with a paper towel and

tried to winch her upright, but there was no doing. I would have to call for backup.

I waited on your staircase steps, Briane huddled at my feet. That was when I saw you again and you were so drunk you tried to hand me another cup of that selfsame party punch that had been splashed on my ankles as Briane had relayed her tale of woe.

I said a foul thing to you, but you didn't seem to hear.

But what you said, frat—do you remember? You said, *I've seen you so many times. Like, my whole life.*

And I didn't know what it meant, but it moved me.

Well, I never cared much for Briane anyway, or any of the Jackson girls with their pearls and buttery purses.

Me, I hold my heart with great care. I do not tender it lightly, over soft words.



*I called at her sister's house*

*About eight o'clock one night.*

*I asked her, would she walk with me,*

*And we'd name our wedding day.*

The party after the LSU game, and there you were, in my own house.

You were holding that stubby Chi O's hair back as she heaved SoCo punch down the front of herself like a little girl spilling lemonade on her Sunday dress.

The church, the library, and now here: I guess it came to seem you were always doing honorable things: praying, studying, helping people.

Later, after king's cup and the glass leg of beer, I looked for you. I hunted the house for you, calling your name, bawling it, shantying it. I sought to conjure you, but you had gone.

It never would have happened if you hadn't left the party. In that way, it was your fault, in part.

Searching on the sagging back porch, so heavy with red-faced partiers it seemed to undulate, a ship on a stormy sea, I came to see that Sigma Nu derelict (oh, I knew his kind, played against them in high school, those tuffhunters from Jackson Prep). He was swinging high his solo cup and shouting for all to hear, his arm flailing back and swatting that little white-blond girl, who collapsed like my grandma's lung.

I had to hit him, you see. I had to hit him every time I did. All those times.

I did not have to kick his head on the porch floor, his body curled S-like, like the snake he was. But it felt at the time that I did.

It turned out the white-blond girl had only been bent over laughing, her beer cup knocked from her hand by that Sigma Nu in a way that made her laugh.

But when she saw what had happened—the guy, the dude, the date-raper-type miscreant lying there on the planks, his face swirled red—she stopped laughing, her hand to her once-loud mouth. She did not even have the words to thank me.

There was the feeling that I should leave, and Keith put his baller hands on me and made it so.

*His bros will be here soon, he said. They will hunt you, dude. They will take you down and bury your bones in the Walk of Champions.*

I wasn't afraid.

I took a long stroll and fell asleep a while on a sofa in the student union. When I returned, everyone was gone. My shirt had red dots all over the front and I tore it off, hulk-like, and hid it in the dumpster behind the house.

The dude was fine. Mr. Sigma Nothing. I saw him in accounting on Monday.

The blood collecting under his cheekbone, well, it looked impressive. Like a Purple Heart.



Two days later, there you were, frat, sitting two tables away at the library Starbucks. You came over, hot chocolate for you, skinny mocha for me.

*Is that what we all drink?* I said. And I told you I'd heard some things about you that I did not care for.

You said it was probably all true. Regrets, misdeeds, bad temper, and careless love. But you weren't like that anymore, everything was changing inside you.

Then, like in a bad song lyric, you fingered a heart in my foam.

I rolled my eyes, but still: I felt a shiver on me. Inside, I was afraid. Because it seemed to me you didn't know yourself at all. Like others, my brother, my loudmouth dad.

But just like that, your finger there, your eyes lowered, I knew I likely loved you anyway. Because we were meant to cross paths, boy, just like I knew what was coming.

I could feel the blood pushing at my temple.



I knew you would taste like the inside of a sweet apple.

I talked you into following me up two sets of library stairs, among the humming copiers, the chug of the vending machines, whispering students, keys clicking.

Then I talked you into taking my hand as I led you between two rolling stacks in a far corner where books on things like tax incidence and the fishery industry sit.

My boy Keith spotted us and summoned a young pledge to wind the handle on one of the moving stacks, pressing us two together.

We could feel everything about each other. I wasn't even embarrassed. We were crushed.

You reached out for my hand. In that moment, I would've married you. If only you—



The next night, we took that walk in Bailey Woods, beers poured into camelbacks, and the sky went gold, then black, and we got lost, even though it's less than a mile deep. Sweet gum trees overhead, kissing long and slow at the juniper stump, our fingers poking into its dark pockets. Then we saw that dead dog and said a prayer over him because we both have Jesus sneaking in our hearts somewhere. We went back to the Kappa Sig house and to your mold-furry room and your roommate gone, and I couldn't get my jeans off fast enough.

You owned my heart, frat boy.

So fast the feeling, I didn't care what was coming.

I think it wasn't what we did in your dirty-sheet twin bed that mattered. After all, it only lasted as long as it takes to walk across the square. I think it was the way you looked at me, the moon coming through the Reb pennant hanging in the window, pink on your boy face.

How you looked at me. Your eyes all crazy, like you saw something I've never seen in myself before, never seen ever.

*There's a universe out there, little girl* is what I came to know through each of those soft explosions I felt after I showed you what to do with your hand, that trick of the wrist.

You had a surprising way of shivering through intimacies, which you did each of the twelve times we did it before I died.



My legs shaking, like a little bare-balled virgin.

I'd forgotten to put in my contacts and during it everything was blurry and flashtastic and I couldn't see much of you in the dark except the dark inside of your mouth, open when you felt the shock of love, or pretended to.

There's been so many girls, and they are all in some way one girl, tan and sparkle-lashed, like my sisters' dolls arrayed on the circle carpet, hair stretched radical to center.

But you.

It was only after that I saw the tear in the condom. Which is on me, baby, it is. It always is.

Would you believe me if I said it wasn't like the other times?

I swear I didn't feel it rip, didn't feel anything but you, your monumental fucking beauty and the little sounds from your throat, and the way your thighs, like smoothed sticks, held me so.

You were in the bathroom for so long after, and I was glad because my legs were still shaking and I didn't want you to see.

The longer I waited, having slung the split condom from thumb to trash can, I started to wonder a little at how quick you had laid down for me.

But I swear, girl, getting you so easy didn't make me love you any less. Just wonder, a little.



It was only when in the bathroom after, the boy bathroom so thick with mildew you could feel it fuzzing your mouth, that I found the piece of latex inside me.

My brother had told me once, and older girls too. *They always know when it happens*, they told me, *and they should stop*.

But it had broken and part of it was inside me now.

*Oh no*, I cursed myself. *I have let myself be fooled and misled. I am such a girl. A weak, weak girl.*

Except still, I didn't know I cared, my hands trembling, shaking with that speckle of powdery latex on my fingertips.

Part of you was inside me now.

And you asked me to stay over. And you talked in your sleep, your face in my hair, your hands on my excitable hips.

You said I was your country girl even though I told you I was from Batesville. I guess you were still drunk.



You came back from the bathroom, scrubbed and smelling like our soap-on-a-rope. Your shyness made my blood hotten again, but I couldn't make it work, the heavy of the beers pinning me down.

We slept.

I dreamed all night of scaling skyscrapers and sailing the high seas. Of pirate ship masts and spaceships. And I was king in all these worlds.

I didn't even care to find I'd slunk so strangely in the bed that my head was resting against your chest, your tiny tits still in their bra, me too drunk to flick the hook.

There would be time enough.

*I have to go, you said, before I could. I have my kitchen shift at six thirty.*

*No, I said, because, look . . .*

*We walked along and talked along  
Till we came to level ground.  
Then I picked up a hedgewood stick  
And knocked this fair maid down.*

Standing in the cold and big kitchen of the Inn at Ole Miss, I could still feel you the whole three hours. In front of the industrial dishwasher, scooping stuck-corn pudding and biscuit-gravy skim into the disposal trough, I could feel you inside, and slipping from me.

*Is this the one?* I wondered. Even as I knew it was.

You see, you were foretold, frat boy.

Sun beating down, the railroad festival in Amory when I was

ten years old, a man in a shabby hat was giving out fortunes from his slanting card table. Staked between the heat-pressed T-shirts and the frozen cheesecake on a stick, he sat in that folding chair, the little sign before him, corrugated cardboard, that read: *Fates Disclosed. Paths Foretold. I See You, and All.*

My brother was far ahead, wending through tents and bouncy castles to catch up with some girls in snug shorts, and I could tell the shabby-hat man had me in his sights.

Pointing one horny finger, he said: *I'll tell anyone but yours. You're too pretty to have your heart broke.* That yellowing finger seeming to hypnotize me closer.

*Tell it!* said a passing lady, large of body with a hat shaped like a steam engine and evil eyes. *Tell the little girl! Tell her what she must know!*

And bringing me close, hand on my arm, the leather twists of his pinched finger skin, the man told. *He will come with nectar on his tongue,* he said, tears in his eyes, I swear. *But he will send your head spinning, seal you up in silver. Swallow you whole.*

Standing there, still in his clutches, I felt my heart cut loose inside me. *Is this to be my fate?*

Suddenly, my brother's hand fell fast upon my shoulder, tugging me backward. *Don't you know not to talk to the tatty hobos?*

Quickly, we were stumbling through the grass of Frisco Park, the sparkle from all the hanging goods, the sparkling purses and glad rags for ladies who'd venture through the festival, looking for objects to wear to entice boys and men.



Listen: I told you I had once been a bad young man, a fool and coward. And I told you I'd changed, and I had. You were my change, and I thought about you days and nights, in accounting and business communication, and porch-drinking at

the house with Keith and the boys. Just like a girl, I held my phone tight, and when it pulsed with you, it felt like a church thing.

I didn't sleep with anyone else, all those three weeks.

*She fell upon her bended knees;  
 "Oh, Willie," she did cry.  
 "Oh, Willie, dear, don't murder me;  
 I'm not prepared to die."*

And so, October fell to November and that Friday came, the one where I came to be sneaking from your bed at dawn in your XXL shirt, green as a glow stick, as play slime, as a jellyfish under a microscope.

Did I know that would be the day? No.

But I had a special stitch of worry over my brow anyway.

Checking my underwear between every class. I was only five days late, but I had not forgotten the latex clot found via my fingertip three weeks prior, and I could not wait any longer.



In our three weeks together, you always came to my room, so I decided that night to come to you. I wanted to see your room, and your tits so extrasoft the night before, I got crazy just thinking about them.

Dusk falling, I stepped through the Tara pillars and into Chi O.

Your door (spare, unfoiled) was open, but you weren't there.

Sitting on your bed, I waited, smelling your powder-fresh smells and looking through your underwear drawers filled with such neon-colored beauty I felt sick from it. Honey and strawberry butter, the sheets smelled just like you.

*You don't remember me,* the girl in the doorway said.

And I said, *Sure I do*. Because I did. From the party where I met you. And how that puke bib she wore and her weakness to drink had taken you away from me.

She said she had something to show me and outstretched her hand, palm up. At first I thought it was a blowpop stick, or a thermometer, its tip blue.

But it wasn't either. It was scepter. A sword into the center of my heart. Because in its little window there was a +, like a tiny blue cross.

She said you had shown it to her, confided. *I just thought you should know*, the girl said. *Being as you're a good guy*. Adding, *She's my sister, but she's a sly kitty*.



*I saw you buy the kit*, Briane said, standing outside the bathroom stall. *I saw you today at the Walgreens*.

Briane always had eyes on all sides of her bobbly head.

*It's okay, sis*, she said. *It's okay*.

I opened the door, my—your—neon shirt like a flag, a flare, staring her down.

*That's right*, I said, *it is okay. Because I'm not*. Which was a lie, at least for now.

Maybe I should have taken the blue stick with me. Hidden it in the dumpster behind the kitchen, somewhere. You could never hide things in the house. The sisters were always watching. But I buried the stick under all the blister-foil laxative strips and seeping old tampons in the stall bin.

Briane couldn't ever have found it. She wouldn't have put her Jackson-girl fingers into that bin, mingling with all our girl blood and shame.



The Chi O girl wouldn't stop talking to me, saying she wants her an Oxford boy or Jackson or Houston oil. Country club golf and

fine china on the Grove, a house with white pillars. None of this had to do with me, my dad in a divorced-man's condo in Atlanta for work, my mom the pharmacist at Kroger.

But the girl kept talking, and I had to leave, sickened suddenly by all the ugliness and the girls's pink-papered doors and sweet vanilla smells that are meant to keep you there forever, to choke you.

The Grove was dark but neck high in girls, all with their mouths open, teeth glowing. Or so it seemed.

But I wished I hadn't started drinking.

If only you'd texted me back right away. I said I needed to see you. Even if you were in some lab, or something.

But you didn't text back, at least not right away, and soon I stopped looking at my phone like a girl, because I found Keith, staking the spot for tomorrow's game, and we started drinking from that bottle of Aristocrat tucked under his arm like a baby doll.

We couldn't put up the tent till nine so we were tossing those loose tentpoles like batons, like girls swinging batons. We were swinging them like baseball bats. The ping of the fiberglass on cement, on everything.

Everything was like a bright, spangled blur. My blood was pounding. Like I said, I wished I hadn't started drinking right then.



At my desk, trying for concentration, I wasn't thinking that much about the blue stick exactly, my palm touching once, twice, my stomach.

*WHERE R U*, your text said.

I texted you back, but you never replied.

*This won't happen*, I said to myself, but I wasn't even sure what it meant.

I knew I wouldn't have that baby. But I wasn't sure the way it would play out.

Until you came calling.



Prowling the campus, Keith loud in my ear beside me, I kept talking about you. About how I'd seen you in church and you were just like the country lass nursing the baby calf who was like my grandma and all good women everywhere, and now I'd defiled you and myself in the eyes of God and all that. Except hadn't she said it was for the girl to save us boys? I couldn't make all the pieces fit.

Keith would have none of it anyway, and never liked church talk. He shoved me hard and told me to stop being a pussy. Then he told me how he saw you sneak out of our room that very morning wearing my shirt like you owned me, or some such badge of domination.

*My shirt*, I said, because I hadn't realized.

And that's how I came to thinking I hadn't defiled you, *you* had defiled yourself, your jeans off so fast our first date, and this dawn striding out of my room in my shirt, my own shirt.

And for that, you must be taught a lesson.

Well, that is how I thought.

*But I paid no attention to the piteous appeal,  
But I beat her more and more,  
Till all around where the poor girl lay  
Was in a bloody gore.*

I had it in my mind that I would retrieve you and we would walk once more in Bailey Woods, like we had that magic night three weeks before when you sealed your fate with me, girl.

But I had no other plan, on account of I could barely walk

and had lost Keith some time ago, left him in the shadow of Vaught-Hem knocking out parking-lot lights with his tentpole.

That last pole he struck, it looked like something surged through him.

When he fell onto the cement, his knees knocked together, like a cartoon. On the ground, stuttering, he was a slug-struck bird.

So I pushed on. I couldn't remember at first which house was yours, even though I'd been there mere hours before.

They all had white pillars, you see.

But I still had that tentpole, it felt like a saber.

Show me your blue stick, I'll raise you a saber.



It was so late. I'd fallen asleep, my arm still stuck in my phys sci textbook.

*You can't hide*, you said, standing in my doorway. And I thought it was a joke, you with the tentpole in your hand, the way you grasped it, caveman, club.

I didn't tell you no when you asked me to come with you. But I did not yet know what was in your heart.

We didn't walk far, you intent on mad circles, swinging that tentpole into trash cans, trees, whatever came in your way.

You said, *I know I'm drunk, but I wanna show you something.*

And I thought, *Is this going to be it? Will this be how it goes?*

When we came under one of the streetlamps, you looked at me, your face shadowed. You said, *Is that my shirt, girl?*



You were more beautiful than ever that night. Your face angel-lit under all the streetlamps.

That's why it happened, if you want to know.

We tramped across campus, all the sculptures and statues of important men. You didn't seem afraid of me, despite all the noise

that came from me, my mouth uncontrollable, and my arms too.

Watching you take that errant tentpole from my hand and twirl it like a baton, like you were a twirler, and weren't you? The way you wielded your weapons, after all. Blue stick, love's arrow, that warm spot between your legs.

And where did we end up anyway, roaming the campus near and far, the great bronze hands of the mentor instructing her flock in the rose garden?

Finally landing back where we began, at the foot of Sorority Row long after midnight.

All those white pillars, there must've been a hundred of them, all gleaming in the moon, and on the pond that lay there, silver and shimmery like a mirror laid flat.

Oh God, don't you see I had no choice?



When I took the pole from you, everything turned. But I had to, don't you see?

*Return my sword, girly*, you said, your voice gone high and strange. And you yanked it so hard, I fell back.

You may ask me how I knew you were going to raise high that tentpole. But I never *didn't* know.

Except I do wish I could have stopped you.



It was the two things at once, you see. It was you holding the pole and you wearing the shirt.

You could spin and flip it in ways that seemed miraculous. All while wearing my shirt, fluorescent-green and too big for you by half, dragged over your head like you owned it. Or me.

Under the shirt, your belly, the thing inside it—well, I thought of that too.

*I know you!* I said, shouting now. *I know your kind!* Because you'd pretended to be a country girl who never heard a word

of sin, a girl who would make me—make me—behave. And be good.

I never met a country girl, and it turned out you were from Batesville.

My, oh, that tentpole in my hand felt like it swung itself, swinging with such a whirring sound and the terrible, suctiony *thunk* as it hit your pretty, perfect head.

*Oh, my girl, my girl.*

The swirl-slap of the alcohol, gallons of it, suddenly cleared away, like the seas parting and receding like the old, bright-colored movie I watched with Gran every Easter my whole life till she died last year.

I saw it then. I saw it. Like everything else fell away and you were praying in church, by the tallest window.

Alas, it was now too late.



*This is it*, I thought.

Yet I felt no danger.

High above your head, that pole glinted under the streetlamp, swinging it like a mighty ax, a giant in a fairy tale.

I felt a crashing in my brain. I think I saw stars. And I was hearing something like beads shaking inside my head, like in the woods, my brother showing me how to shake the cocoon we found in the branch.

If the caterpillar is alive, it's heavy, you hear a thud.

If it's dead, it's light, and all you hear is a rattle.

I wonder what you heard when you shook me, frat boy. Oxford boy. My beloved.

Did you hear our baby rattle?

*Then I picked her up by her little white hand,  
And I swung her body around.*

*I took her down to the riverside  
And threw her in to drown.*



Remember how you fell?

Landing on your knees with such an awful smack, the pond like a black hole behind you, the black hole spreading in my brain. Oh, how you looked up at me, your eyes shining.

*Please don't*, you said.

But I saw what the pole had done, your temple sunk deep as a cave and your eye bulging.

You didn't know it yet, but you were nearly gone.



Your face, I watched you watch me, my head spinning so.

It was that face I knew from the twelve times in your darkened room. The face that told me you had big visions of life in your head, the way you were shivering, standing above me, that same lovely way of shivering you had each of the twelve times we did it before I died.

I don't remember falling, but the red covered my eyes and I could see nothing.

Someone was crying.



They say the light goes out of the eyes when you pass, but it didn't with Gran at Baptist Memorial and so not with you, my country girl.

I saw the shining as I carried you from Sorority Row straight to the edge of Silver Pond.

I saw it as I dropped you in the water, and my sword too, which was nothing but a tentpole, bent upon itself.

I saw it long after you sunk to the shallow bottom, my shirt billowing, a bright lily pad, and your body making ring after ring after ring.



I wasn't gone yet, but you were dragging me. Down that grassy slope I went, like a sleigh ride, the leaves curling and cutting my legs.

I grabbed at you, clawing at your ankles, nails sunk deep, but you have near a hundred pounds and a foot of monster blood and bone on me.

My hair knotted in your hand, I looked up at you and my head kept knock-knock-knocking on the ground, the blood coming wet and soft from the open hole in my head.

*He will come with nectar on his tongue.*

I guess I always knew that shabby-hatted man would prove true one day.

*But he will send your head spinning, seal you up in silver. Swallow you whole.*



You were well under.

There was stirring briefly, glugging bubbles. Once, your head came up, your eyes glassy, arms grabbing, wanly, the surface of the water. Then your head tilting backward, disappearing.

Finally, you stopped.

Then I went home.

*But I rolled and I tossed upon my bed,  
And no rest could I find,  
For the flames of Hell seemed all 'round me,  
And in my eyes would shine.*

I did find my bed, my ankles and shins slimed up from the pond, and my face speckled red as Raggedy Andy.

I showered at three, no one heard. Then back to bed, a heave and horror in me, where I commenced crying.

Before that, I'd never even noticed Silver Pond. But the next day, and the next, Silver Pond was all I could see, from wherever I stood.

As there was no escaping it, I sought it out.

I even lingered at your house, hand on one of the pillars, like a wedding cake, wondering, missing you.



In the water, I sunk. I felt the thing blooming at the top of my chest, spreading down and in. The thing was the darkness of you, and what we shared.

My lungs swimming inside me, my heart growing small and raisin-like, I thought how it came to be.

Might I have shrunk from my fate?

But one can't ponder such things too long.



*Her sister threw my life away*

*Without a thought of doubt.*

*Her sister swore I was the man*

*Who led her sister out.*

I might've got caught anyway, but your sister sealed the deal.

*He saw the stick and then he left the house filled with rage.* That's what the Briane girl told the police, as if she'd played no part.

*They were a fiery pair,* she said, her voice excited, *and now their fire has swallowed them both.*

What did she know of us, girl?

For ours was a tender thing, deep down.

*But I would not mind dying*

*If I thought t'would bring me rest*

*From this burning, burning, burning hell*

*That keeps burning in my breast.*

They talked about how I smiled when they put the cuffs on to take me to county and that's not true.

But I did tell them how I pictured you up there in heaven,  
halo fired up, having sweet tea with my grandma.

How she said: *A good girl to save us boys, each and every one.*



Here comes that grapple hook again, swinging slow for me.

I can hide among the floating ferns and duckweed.

I won't leave until it has me.

From here I can see the white pillars.

My, how they shine.