

The Arcade of Always

her voice was always a toy in a claw machine.
you had to grab it just right,
maneuver it through the lungs, up the esophagus,
out of the throat for it to reach
her mouth,

dropped just before the prize could ever
tumble from her lips –
rigged to lose.
Always

her head played like an arcade game,
single-player, coins and thoughts rattling inside her vault.
she sat in tract mode,
demonstrating knights and racers and spaceships,
pixels fighting off hordes of asteroids,
apes and other monsters of man made manifest on machines.

inevitable victors.
the same words rang out:
“YOU LOSE”
Always

her high scores were in:

- slotting into space, her body turning and turning shades of blue and purple
boxes, clearing out rows and rows of points
and jagged edges as she contorted to fit. anywhere.
- controlling her stomach, she spit out food like a ticket dispenser,
dragging them out and across her tongue, she sifted through the bile
for the prize in her reflection.
- stealth missions, she kept cheats tucked inside her favorite pair of shoes
which paths were optimal for avoiding the ghosts in the walls.

she beat her records daily,
she was the only one who played.
the winner in an empty arcade –
the only one to lose.
Always

her hands were patchwork and sewn on with her smile—
no tears from button eyes,
and she bled stuffing out the prize box as she c
and fraying, she
u n r a v e l e d herself starting

through the lungs,
up the esophagus,
out the throat

she went.
and she lost
her stuffing
her thread
her heart
her head
her buttons
her blood
her bones
her love
for herself.

Everything

but her voice
didn't even squeak from its hold
in the spindled claws.

It just

dropped

lost
for Always.