

## MORNING GLORIES

we planted little cemeteries in the backyard when i was younger  
for the various still creatures we found in the street —  
    a little robin that flew into the window  
    a bunny we couldn't nurse back from freezing and  
    butterflies with broken wings

we sang hymns and recited verses from a little green bible  
all i knew of death was that corner of the yard —  
    cardboard boxes under mounds of dirt  
    soil the dog kept digging up until my mother planted  
    morning glories over their tiny headstones

we spread candles on the roadside for a girl who died when i was sixteen  
we didn't know what else to do with all the stillness —  
    notes tucked into the slits of her locker  
    a moment of silence after the morning announcements  
    fresh flowers by her picture in the auditorium

we were the last to see that high school standing before they tore it down  
now atop our first understanding of death —  
    they built a park over the rubble  
    i think of that corner of the yard and hope that  
    they planted morning glories planted over the past

## THIS IS WHEN

snow falling silently in the parking lot / everything mute with darkness /  
you ran out of tears so you went outside and let the snowflakes take their  
place on your cheeks instead / laughing bitterly at God /

winter must be some sick joke / an outward manifestation of  
what it felt like to live inside your head / he knows you love a good metaphor /

the arm of a someone leaving on your shoulder / a call to your father in the middle of the night /  
a soggy page in your diary / all begging the same mantra /

*everyone says it gets better /  
when does it get better / when does it get better /  
can you tell me when /*

smoke falling against the glow of the street lights / everything buzzed with fireworks  
and distant cheering / i ran out of chasers so i went outside to let the neon wash warm my cheeks  
instead / my name being called out from inside the house /

voices that never said my name until long after the snow had melted / people i love the way i can  
knowingly distinguish the tread of footsteps in a different room / i wish i could tell you about  
them /

wish i could wrap my arms gently around your shoulder /  
a call i wish i could make into the past / pages i wasn't sure i'd ever write in the same diary /  
all repeating the same mantra /

*they were all right /  
it gets better / it gets better /  
just wait a little longer / this is when /*

## OCEAN

i was born beside the ocean & my parents spent the riches of their early twenties bathing my skin in sun until my curls were stained in saltwater & my limbs knew no earth without warmth

& then there was my mother, turning my chin to the waves and saying  
*this is in your blood, baby, do you feel it in your bones?*

i spent my childhood searching for that feeling & trying to let it permeate my existence further than just an extra bubble to fill in on a standardized test or a racial clarification to my last name

trying to feel home somewhere & feel the sunlight in my bones

when i was sixteen i flew across the ocean to the place where my skin soaked in the sun that i inherited & all the humid air and foreign words felt like squinting at a memory

& still there was my mother, turning her chin to the waves and saying  
*this is in your blood, baby, do you feel it in your bones?*

i think i understood it then, the ocean lapping deeper than my ankles, an ambiguity connected to so many borders & a home not fluent or belonging to any one body of land

home in the folds of a moving ocean & carrying its sunlight in my bones

## **I ALMOST SAID I LOVE YOU**

when washing dishes together in your childhood home / bickering and complaining like kids /  
you had your sleeves rolled up to your forearms / your tattoos were showing /

when the humidity made your hair curl / your dad told me to tell you to cut it /  
i told him i liked your long hair too much / i do / like you too much /

when on the phone with you / it almost slips out before we hang up /  
like some forgotten mantra / that feels comfortable and terrifying at the same time /  
sometimes i say it after the line goes dead / i can't decide which would feel more natural /

when we are talking in the dark and i go silent / you ask me what i'm thinking /  
i try to find a different way to express it / i picture myself mouthing the words /  
how i love you in ways / i dare not put a name to /