

## **Birth Marks**

### ***Temple***

I am too faded // but for the most intimate / appraiser // diminished // by time / disguised by age // the small divot / slight darkening / a pox on the delicate / child's body //

Pale skin dotted pink / tumble down a fever dream / delirium of bright wax colors // masterpiece of innocence / quickly painted over // I am the original sin / bittersweet apple / fangs through protective flesh / swallowing the sweetness / abandoning the core / the deepest / knowledge of darkness / the bite / of disconnection //

A phantom of touch // search for relief // scar of primordial need.

### ***Carpus I***

Below the fold / where wrist meets palm // twisted cross / bird in flight // scrape of metal on skin // imperfect / catch to a fall //

Fleeing grandmother's hospital bed // her scarred flattened chest the family birthright // four stitches // one for each of the child's years //

Doctor sewing skinned / bodies back together // mother sobbing between gasping mother / screaming daughter // grief upon grief / upon grief.

### ***Genuflect***

A patchwork on both knees // we are legion for we are many // bite of gravel // lightning bolt nerves on curbs // long slow ache on pews //

Blood / bone / stone / branch / dirt / sand // patella lodging pain / fearlessness / girlhood safety // discovering all pleasures have their limits //

An exorcism of innocence // boy child racing bicycles / becoming girl child chased / learning protection / means cover / shrink / hide //

freedom driven out / of the body and off the cliff // in a scrape of blood and dust.

### **Achilles**

A needle and a lighter / adolescent attraction to the sharp and the hot // discovery that pain can be desire  
// can be communion //

I am the etch of initials into ankles // symbols onto thighs / soft touch of a girl's hand // the soothe before  
the sear //

Learning to bite cheeks // to hold inside the agony / of the burn // to look with love / into the eyes // while  
hands make visible / the ache.

### **Carpus II**

I am the attempt at symmetry / at remembering // of turning accident to intention // I am the small x on the  
other wrist // the cold metal / blade a mother's gift / a lesson / in reining in / the unruly / the unsightly //

Easy after so many effortless nicks on knees // now with a quick flick of a scarred wrist // a fledgling cry /  
blood in bath / flood of fear / arousal of power / apprehension of depth //

Wrists pressed together / flight of two doves // parent/child, lover/beloved, memory/imagination.

### **Bridge**

Black rubber burned into intersection // skull thump on dash // funeral program crushed in pale knuckles //  
screams from the backseat // car full of black-clad teenagers blindsided / by grief //

Another friend lost to another car / garage parked / suburban idling // Flashing lights and sirens / the  
ferryman chaperone // from one death to another //

I am the dull thud / the quirk in the eyebrow // I am the mark of the beast / I am the permanent witness / to  
bereaved mothers // burying their faces // in the rent garments of their children.

### **Pelt**

A congregation of cells // supposed to be dispersed // on the skin // malignancy / in waiting //

Sentinels guarding crease of thigh / valley of breasts / nape of neck // bulwark of the body's own making //  
paladin of purity / that terrible angel //

Removal a benediction / now I am who am // trinity of steeped scars // chambered echoes of stitch / and staple / of shame / both excised / and etched into / the body.

### ***Extremity/Pointer***

Lonely celebration // wine bottle spiral // no corkscrew / but // resourcefulness / recklessness // in abundance // a deep / scissor slice to forefinger //

Blood dashing / on graduation gown / clear cut to tendon / mechanics of a body bared //

Close call / not the first / not the last // expletive of luck luck luck //

I am the revelation / of the father / in the daughter // inheritance of affliction / calamity in the veins // a patrimony of self-destruction.

### ***Umbilicus***

I am the feline / striped witness / to motherhood // flanking the knotted depression / in the belly // legacy of the matriarchy //

I am the leanness / I am the swelling / the pain and / pleasure of fullness // of emptiness //

I am the presence of mothers past // passed to their babies // the gut of their own lives // their own //

Scarification.

## Dear Crossing

Do you remember

dear

the first time

dear

became an accusation?

dear

we drove through the desert

at night, headlights revealing

dear

as something we crashed into

not knowing its impact, the sound of

dear

cracking windshields

tightening seatbelts

dear

when did something so soft

become all antlers, all stab

at the sound of it

dear

we said it as humor until

it became habit until

it became hatred

dear

in that desert i carried

within me someone half you

and someone all me, and new

dear

became dare, became read  
these signs of warning, we knew  
to be afraid those nebulous nights  
of things we could only see as shadows

dear

I was already a shadow when  
we stood on the mesa  
shielding our eyes from sunset  
our outlines behind us, discrete

dear

my vision of you deserted  
in a place that felt like death  
whatever silhouettes we have left  
must learn to thrive on scarcity  
survival is dire with you still here -

## Exit Interview

When I asked my mother to explain  
mammogram                    she said  
imagine all you were told was beauty  
pressed to dust in a pill  
you'll choke to swallow.

When I asked my mother to explain  
biopsy                            she said  
an interrogation at needlepoint -  
all the body's secrets laid bare  
under bright lights.

When I asked my mother to explain  
chemo                            she said  
When you kill parts of yourself,  
even the ones you want to die,  
you can't help but be sick with the loss.

When I asked my mother to explain  
radiation                        she said  
remember Rich said, "your wounds come  
from the same source as your power"  
and there is no cure for either, only exposure.

When I asked my mother to explain  
hair loss                         she said  
when you spend your life wearing  
a crown of thorns and honey  
there is relief in the tender touch of a silk scarf.

When I asked my mother to explain  
scar                      she said  
even a leaf leaves a mark on a tree when it falls.  
Does the oak mourn the damage done, or  
stretch its limbs and grow something new?

When I asked my mother to explain  
prosthesis              she said  
sometimes we put things on for the comfort  
of others and sometimes their comfort  
becomes our own.

When I asked my mother to explain  
remission              she said  
every day the sacrament on my tongue,  
an absolution, a benediction  
another lifetime with you.

When I asked my mother to explain  
relapse                  she said  
it is a slipping into waters already swum  
back to the cardinal element  
held by the crystal light of the moon.

When I ask my mother to explain  
goodbye                she says  
nothing, only slides the skin of her liminal fingers  
against the vein of my hand, my inheritance  
and presses precisely, tenderly, the terrified pulse she finds there.

## Springboard

Before the toe dipped  
into deeper ends and before  
the deck-smack of wet steps,  
dampened feet getting colder  
each metal rung up the ladder,  
before heels hold the wobbling  
body to the board, before  
the arch before the sigh before  
breath  
before splash and sting  
of water-slapped skin before  
the body bubbling to surface, gulping  
lungs clung to sides of safety -

There is the gasp, the shivery snap,  
clammy shell of a still-sodden suit  
pulled over goose-pimpled skin  
prickling apprehension, there  
is the glance at eyes, familiar,  
older crinkled slant of some wonder  
unfathomed until long later, and now  
satisfied someone is watching, dry  
docked feet walk, wrinkling  
toward the after.

## CLAWS

*Everything I've ever let go of has claw marks on it. - David Foster Wallace*

Let go and let god, your dad  
used to say, but you hold on  
the same way that he did.

Bits left under beds of by-  
gones left in shreds, a holding  
pattern repeated.

As long as you live I will grow,  
and so will the slivers  
of memory you cling to.

Bodies I've gashed, every  
bit of your past, careful -  
I'll also slice you.

Claws deliver to fangs  
who devour, your hunger  
pangs finally sated,

By violence wrought  
against instinct, caught in  
affections I have abraded.

Paint me red and pretend,  
possession can lend beauty,  
and what it grows into.

Blades made by your cells,  
forensics that tell the dead  
stories you've finally lived through.