

Elephant Graveyard

I remember I sat on the green rug, the one with pink roses etched into the matted corners, my back against Nana's shins, my head resting

on her knees and her wrinkled skin malleable like rolled-up flower petals under her satin pajamas. Simba and Nala flashed across the TV screen pushed

against the far wall, caught in a mauve-gray garden of brushed, broken bones sprinting against chromatic triplets, drawing me forward and away from her legs.

So I didn't notice immediately—the sudden absence of her warm hand on my hair, but at the end of the montage when the vibrant

blues and ochres simmered around Simba's now-full mane, from the dark corner of the living room I heard Grampa's voice, as a body weighted with rocks

would sink silently to the bottom of a lake inked black,

“Pat?”

I remember I swiveled around to look back at Nana in the emerald armchair. Her head had fallen back from her open palm, mouth gaping and lips chapped white,

a metallic wire and yellowed tooth pinched loosely between her thumb and forefinger. When he shook her the tooth apparatus fell to the carpet, grotesque against the rough

pale green and pink rug fibers. Later, years later my mother paints her a terrible new portrait, scrapes patches of mud over the colors, brilliant slivers over Nana's smile.

Nana, as my mother remembers, dazed from her dose of “medicine” every night. Nana with weeds wrapped around her blue-blotched ankles at the lake's bottom, *that shadowy*

place, feet floundering for the bedrock floor and fighting to focus on Zazu swooping across the sky above *everything the light touches*. And I can remember her breath

as her eyes blinked back slow at my grandfather. Rotted sour, unearthed elephant graveyard.

Subduction Zone

We had a pool, a deep pit of planes carved
in and down to the earth. When I ran my feet
against the vinyl floor—cerulean dappled with jet-black
splotches—the soft pads of my toes would catch

against stray pebbles caught in the taut rubber.
My mother refused to enter the backyard
alone after dark because of that pool, water so dark
the bottom would vanish in the shadow of our house

after the sun dipped below the treeline, jagged midnight
peaks against the deepening sky. She begged my father to drain
the water and fill the pit with earth to cultivate together.
Instead he wove nets across the surface to catch the leaves,

the drowned birds with feathers twisted up like the weeds
he ripped from around the pool. Awake in bed I'd hear the lap
of water as he swam agitated circles by moonlight, anger seeping
from his pores like magma, evidence of his temper that seared us

dissipating with each ripple. When I was six, I dreamt
I was playing in the dried grass, yellowed wicker pricks
along the edge of the pool where I found a boy's body
floating face-down in the dark water, amber hair

suspended on the surface, a floating halo around his head
and his skin blotched blue-black-gray. Pearly, even.
My screams rang in my head even after my mother
shook me awake, cradled me in the heat of the bed

between her body and my father's. Later, they cautioned
the neighbors against letting their son play too close
to the short fence separating our backyards,
their son with the amber hair who took to staring at the pool

through the dulled chain links. One afternoon
I followed my father, several steps behind, halfway
around the pool until we reached the filter. He knelt
against the hot cement to fish out the basket, handed it to me

to clean out the mangled wasp and beetle bodies, membranous
wings glued to fragile abdomens, disintegrating
with every gentle tap of the basket on the cement. Insects
sizzling in the super-heated puddles of pool water. A sudden

influx of rage, my father snatched the basket from me, volcanic
mood swing I had almost anticipated this time
as he demonstrated his way, the correct way. The only way.
Using his fingers to scrape out masticated carcasses,

flicking them onto the rocks along the fence.
He deposited the chlorine tablets back into the basket,
wasp legs severed like light bulb filaments, adhered
to the pores like wet strips of papier-mâché. But

I also remember my father, pretending to be a shark,
swimming from the deep end of the pool
where the water was never quite warm to the shallow end,
slow as though the pool was filled with honey.

The water around his body almost glowing. His anger,
for the moment, at bay. A trail of magma smoldering
below the surface, the pool a subduction zone.
How I would cling to the railing at the edge, legs twisted

around the hot metal, laughing, giddy as my skin
blistered waiting for my father to pluck my small body
from the edge, the sharp taste of chlorine as water
rushed into my mouth, and the sting of cold air

as he whipped me toward the deep end—
body tucked, braced for impact. Eyes pressed tight
against the drowned insects floating on the surface,
bodies boiled in his trail of silica.

Ghazal for the Trees

Four men in neon jackets descend around the tree trunks and, as a swarm of bees, fall.
Their chainsaws buzz, cut into the soft bark like a knife to skin so that the trees fall.

Branches severed like flayed limbs litter the grass as the men amputate the first oak—
they hack, spraying bits of bark that ricochet off my window in lifeless freefall.

The men push on the mangled stump and as my nails cut crescents into my palms
I remember watching different neon men crush saplings with bulldozers, how the trees fall

like matchsticks. Crouching with my sister under the windowsill, we are murder witnesses
to the crew levelling our neighbor's yard. How the maples, abandoned like disease, fall

under the weight of metal. My sister, scribbling a sign she plasters in our window:
you should be ashamed, and how after seeing it our father stares until our knees fall

to the floor where we must belong alongside the bugs that eat our flakes of dead skin,
his disappointment palpable as the air particles in the room slow and freeze, fall,

drop to the floor around us. How we scramble to pick up the molecules, put the puzzle
back together before we are permanently stained. How, in his eyes, we as banshees fall

somehow lower than even the neon men uprooting living bodies, roots frayed and torn.
Outside, circling the empty air where their nests used to be, a family of displaced chickadees fall.

Windwalker

The denim over his knees rubs rough against black shingles specked with grit. The man bear-crawls across his roof, work boots brown as wet paper bags, palms

flat and fingers spread wide against the grated surface. He shields his eyes from a gust of wind, hammer gripped tight in his fist, gloved fingers worn soft. He has leaned

a ladder, metal glints in the late autumn light, against the gutter, paint chipping with clangs in the brisk bursts of frigid air. As the man lowers his hand

the wind rips across the roof, spills the ladder to the ground in a clatter that echoes claps against the windows of the house. The man is a statue against the wind, fingers tight

around the hammer's handle as he solidifies, ice gargoyle perched light on his fingertips – then a voice, distant, from the ground *Papi?*

A young girl in a pilling, fleece periwinkle jacket embroidered with white polar bears in ballet slippers hides around the corner of the house, short black hair

lashes her cheeks. The gargoyle cracks, ice shell whipped away in the blinding wind. *-M--!*

The man points to the orange extension cord, bright against the withered blonde blades of grass. *-Tie the end to the ladder*

The girl obeys, wonders what would happen if she were to walk with the wind, away. *-and toss it up to me.*

The girl obeys, wonders where the wind would deposit her body,
cardamom chrysalis in an unmarked grave.