

Trash

April is coming up, Earth Month.
My colleague organizes hundreds of volunteers
to collect litter from our parks.
I know this is helpful,
better the plastic bottles and styrofoam plates
go to the landfill, not into a stream
or an animal's throat.

I know where our trash goes.
This is a point of pride in environmental circles,
like knowing what watershed you live in.
I toured the landfill with my coworkers.
We piled into an air conditioned bus
that drove us up up up the mountain of trash.
We saw the trucks dumping their loads,
the machines that pack the trash tighter,
the seagulls that scream and swoop.
Even in the bus, the smell seeped in.

My friend's husband works there.
He drives one of the machines.
You get used to the smell, he tells me.
Also: a woman's body is there.
She was murdered, wrapped in a rug,
and dumped. By the time they figured it out,
she was buried too deep.
They left her there.

We eat a credit card's worth of plastic
each week, which makes us no different
from all the other animals. Except that,
I guess, we made the plastic in the first place.
We will be buried in it, just the same.

The Letter

I wrote my mother a strongly worded letter last week.
I folded it twice, tucked it in an envelope,
addressed it, stamped it.
The postal service didn't take it.
I couldn't help wondering if it was a sign.

I couldn't wait. I brought it in,
tore it open, typed it up and emailed it to her.
The weight of those unsaid words was too heavy.
She got it today, I know because
she put a thumb's up on the message I sent.

I'm sitting on the porch swing she got me
for my 30th birthday, feeling guilty.
Why is it so hard to draw lines
with the ones we love most?
I waited for years to put these words down.

Not that I hadn't tried saying them,
one way or another. But I'm trying again.
Removing any ambiguity.
Struggling to draw the line
between my choices and hers,
my life and hers.

Our lives were arguably once the same.
Half of me began when she did,
waiting in the wings for a chance to be born.
All these years, that distance
has just stretched farther and farther,
from womb to now, and I feel her
tugging at that extant umbilical cord.
On my end, I'm gnawing it with my teeth.

Vigil in Labor and Delivery

-For Laila Juarez King

“You can fall asleep to my baby’s heartbeat,”
she offered, smiling.
Now the room is darkened,
computer monitors glowing softly.
Her husband snores,
sprawled on the foldaway couch.
She tries to rest, propped up in the hospital bed.

Parenthood looms over them.
They snatch what sleep they can
before this newest human arrives,
transforms from aquatic to terrestrial,
liquid in her lungs to air,
darkness
to light.

Ixtab Speaks

Funny how colonizers have a way of...colonizing
Corrupting the sacred into the perverse
How they claim their beliefs
are the path to salvation

Take the ceiba tree—
roots stretching to the underworld,
branches piercing the 13 levels of heaven,
and the trunk where we Mayans lived

Take me, the goddess of the gallows—
My sacred task of guiding suicides to heaven
cheapened to a demon
luring drunk men to their deaths

Look how they entwined us:
Xtbaya the demon, lurking
in the shade of the ceiba tree,
waiting for her next victim

As if I could be a cautionary tale
to keep men from straying

As if I had nothing better to do
than stand around and comb my hair with cactus flowers

Summer night at Clear Lake

The springy grass underfoot,
smelling like summer with each bent blade

Fireflies blinking in empty milk jugs,
the wood smoke, blowing off the lake

filling the house if we forgot
to close a window or door

The seaweed ripeness of the water,
lapping against the dock

Closing our eyes to the impossible brightness of stars,
grounded, we knew in the darkness

exactly where we had to be