

Drafts

They ordered you like new furniture,
picked out your delivery date by jabbing a finger at a pocket calendar.
You came out unclean. Offended by the fluorescents,
you were subjected to the airy speculations of the doctor
that ended up being true- those limbs were made for movement.

The family cat did not like you.
He avoided your sticky, probing fingers and the gaping
vacuum that was your mouth- a door always left ajar
which let loose from its basement a human's cry ancient
as the ribbon corridors of bowels.
But someday, sooner rather than later,
the crotchety Maine Coon would entrust you with its sorrow-
cast up at you its dying gaze that flickered on and off,
like the orange porch light you will kiss your high school boyfriend under,
as the maggots set up their suburbia inside its lower intestines.

When you were one there was a snowstorm.
The world welcomed you with ice and a full body
rash, made you wait years for the luscious little girl hair
you would become known for. When you were three
you unlearned how to breathe, began turning blue when overly-excited.
They told them your clothes were too tight, but it'd be years before you'd have
the weight problem, and subsequently the eating problem, but much later
you'll invest in Thich Nhat Hahn and the inspirational tags
on Yogi tea, realizing how "just fine" you grew up to be.
You'll remember too nostalgically the timbre of self-hatred,
the illusion that clenched fists can feel like a grip
on a wheel you know doesn't exist- but you hold your hands
at ten and two anyway, just on the off-chance there is a God.

But before all that you turn six and learn what momentum feels like.
You beg to be spun from anywhere on anything
until your vision and stomach flip on its side.
You'll crave disorientation all your life,
you'll make a career out of falling.
At eleven you understand what it is to be lonely,
filling her absence with self-sufficiency,
and quiet, and a hunger for excellence.
But this is around the time you grasp the concept
of mortality and nothing can make you forget the imminence of death.
Even when you visit the expensive sunlit café you can't shake off the dread,
can't look at your mother's face without seeing it white-lipped and dead.

You'll feel something similar at thirteen,
lying awake in amber shadows (you still use a nightlight,
not subscribing yet to the salvation of ignorance)
suffocated in equal parts by the way people can break one another
and the irony of existing at all.

Looking back you're still transfixed by your first kiss
At fourteen during truth or dare at dusk behind a half-
crumbling historical site. You hone your love of contradiction,
betting the Moravians would never guess that their meeting house
would someday be reborn as the place where
your tongue met Dominic Fetter's, which was too big
but impossibly warm and soft like bubblegum.
At sixteen you get high.
The scope of your existence is as narrow as the creek
where you will negotiate barefoot between rocks as you search
for a glimpse of those iridescent tricks of the eye- fish.

You fall in love somewhere along the way,
you will break each other's heart at more distinct points.
Almost twenty, you leave on a plane
fourteen hours and a horizon away.
Home dissolves in your wake
but you will still cling to those few months as
a glittering gift; sweet, dense and messy like mochi.
You come to know that he needs you to say it more than
you need it to be true, and how not all loss feels like losing.

When you return
you'll move away, following through on a threat for the first time.
You hide out in a city of 8.5 million,
dissolving into the rusts of the Harlem skyline.
You learn how solitary a thing freedom can be.

At twenty-one you write poems.

In the Summer I think about The Heat

Heat thick as water

I'm fascinated by the fact that the earth cleans up after us.
Our tallest, shiniest, sturdiest building
is being eaten away as it's conceived.
Nature's constancy,
or lack there of,
comforts me.
All's fair game:
the multi-million dollar mansion
and the dog shit on my curb.

Heat like grief

Our loneliness, our love are
lost vibrations. The intangible, throaty om is
all the world contained between rounded, forward-moving mouth
and tucked, receding tongue.

Rusted city on its knees

Strung out by stars we are
a balancing act of a universe contained by skin,
delicate negotiations of matter and memory
guided by bones and some sovereign hands,
with ancient intestines that wind like ivy,
and the shapes of all the mouths that ever were
are mine and yours infinitely.
We are the rhythmic slosh of blue, insistent blood
echoing the tides of seas we'll never see.
We are just as transient as everything else (feel relieved!)
No more permanent than monument or breeze.

Elegy for Moons

4:50 is silver.
Fingernail peeled off,
horrifying bit of body lost
in cherry gelato last year.
Come war.
Death, second-hand, is noiseless.
You become absence.

Being alive is: burping,
walking, laughter, the crayon in my hand and
not my mouth, this is the way to school (three
short streets and a turn at
Stongington, under maple trees),
like love, a little hummus goes a long way,
thank you notes for the neighbor,
buy tomatoes on the vine.

Swells. Proud splinter
caught in the palm of a horizon.
The insinuation of your half, or rather
the globe of your whole rests in a shell of light,
warming.

Forgive, the cat eats yogurt (but it shouldn't),
the seventh step squeaks, start with three sections
vertically folding twice along the seam,
oral in French, oral and french, gloved, waxy fingers
at the dentist (feel for mouth and throat cancer caused
by cigarettes you haven't smoked yet), don't soak
cast iron, empathy, geometry in the back
pocket, moving to the driver's seat, "and
are fries alright with that?" online banking,
metaphysics, Futurism, letting
go, giving back, subway map (the R's not
running), collection of coins, division of labor,
listening for Stacy,
then Gabe, and Helen, and Dick,
clean pomegranates underwater.

On Sunday you are fatter, like the rest of us.
Your lover gets all the glory by Monday.

5:18 a double pane makes three.

Thailand. Sun rising hot over street
vendors unfurling colored tarps from carts.
Do you know the waves lapping at Baishawan,
white sands reinventing themselves
in foam. Lazy snow drift in Murska Sobota,
dominoes in South Sudan.
Or *les gardiens* scrubbing the blood;
the warm water only livens the
red, rouses the pools to blossom again.

If there's no god we've only got each other.
Some one must mourn the weevil,
write an elegy for the leaves, lost faces
in Beirut, the small lives that live next door
(house with weeds for miniature bouquets and
pink, cracked clay) to the AK 47's with cross-hair
trained on the spot Lola or Anne's just scrubbed
apricot exfoliator into (though already running
late, she knows he'll be even later).

11 something and the search comes up
empty. Eyes grapple, hands in
wet darkness, finding only
the toy fizzle of parking lot lights.

Villanelle

Your palms like valleys catch the rain.
These hands turn over empty,
there's no refrain.

These are the things that remain:
the tenor of your voice and labyrinths for fingerprints,
your palms like valleys that catch the rain.

You waited but I never came,
Too preoccupied with speculation, why
there's no refrain.

You are this thing I scrub out over and over like a stain,
but I'm not one for self-restraint; I visit this place often just to watch
your palms like valleys catching the rain.

It's not well maintained,
all the houses are overgrown, their insides spilling out across the lawn;
there's no refrain.

What did I gain--
the blaze of this city pales in comparison to
your palms like valleys that catch the rain.

Not All Loss Feels Like Losing

retrospect wrenched wrenches things into place
oil doesn't mix until stirred
and even then it drifts
honest orbs
unapologetic
shiny

my collage of these moments,
leaves space for the details:
the faded valleys of your palm,
winding roads with cross-hair folds,
and a labyrinth at each fingerprint

sometimes Change takes its time
straightens up first
brews coffee
paints a fresh coat
before setting fire
slow-burn or atom bomb
ashes corkscrewing up into the wind
carried off to virgin eyes
not all loss feels like losing