

Poem 1:

The Night of Gnocchi

This dinner's going to be a three hour ordeal, I can already tell, with its multitudinous sauces & browning of butter et al. But you look as though your body has been more burden than blessing, and in the kitchen some of your heaviness sloughs into the potatoes. Maybe the fancy olive oil will help you pass the sorrow-stone. I wait with a hammer and an outstretched palm.

Your knife parlays with the mushrooms, as much conversation as you are willing to bear. When I eat the bowl we have prepared, I will look you in the eye and tell you it is delicious and that I've never had anything like it, because it's true, and also because if I tell you how lovely you are without a fork in my hand, you will shake your head.

I cannot give you peace, so I grate you Parmesan. Pass me your bowl. Tell me when.

Poem 2:

i am afraid of knowing

i'm staring. i'm itchy. i can't tell if the insect bites are bothering me or if my fingers just need something to do. i've bundled up everything i've learned from the way you don't talk about your mom & your pushed-up sleeves & how you lean away from people as though their burdens will catch. i've rolled it up neatly and put it under my tongue. it is itchy. it is choking me. i want to chew it up like betel and spit the nasty juice back at you. i want to open my mouth and show you that you have nested inside. i want to put my mouth to yours and pass you back and forth with our tongues. i think i am going to kill you. instead

i am quiet. slapping my arm over and over even though there's nothing there. wondering if the stillness will kill me.

Poem 3:

The Bequest

My love & yours are a trellis and the vine. Each
borne of our mothers. Lispy lullabies that
steeped into your skin and lengthened your lashes—
Sometimes, we think of ourselves of ourselves as fortresses,
forgetting who built the moat, who tamed the dragon,
who piked heads at the gate.

My aunts, whose affection glinted a
ruthless shade. My brother, who drowned
in my mother's love. I, who bruised yellow
and read kindness there. When I
do not feel its sharp edges, I cannot trace
the shape of loving.

And yet
my fingers cannot still against your back. They are
whispering these mythologies that die in the throat.
They are mapping and unmaking your skin. They leave
scratches without intending & weep when the blood
wells. These roughshod fingers know nothing
other than this.

And then there's you, with your butter and your breeze.

You come up behind me, press three
fingers to a rib. I
come undone.

Poem 4:

dialectic

i am one atom
crawling some desolate dreamscape
four plaster walls
bind my being
the story of my birth is found
scripted in the constellations
just one lonely hero
to know me is to know that
my footprint is
nothing more than history.

fused by cowbone and clasped hands
i peel back layers of sinew & find only someone else
immure the dirt of ancestral treason &
seek the old religion in swollen jackfruit trees and see—
under the porch swing and the hands that strung it steady
are the folktales i feed my children
formed of every monster whispered through ages
we are just pebbles left atop a stranger's tombstone &
every footprint we've raked our hands through—