

What Are You Doing By Yourself Out Here?

a monologue from an agnostic teenage girl

Words repeated through the thick silence
as I'd kneel beside my bed so my elbows sunk into the pulp
of the mattress. A monologue I memorized
at the age of ten and repeated in harmony with my heartbeat
for ten years after. For my father
was diagnosed before I had received
all of my adult teeth, and my little pink painted fingernails clasped
together, queuing the first measure
of my monologue. Each pill, vaccination, dietary restriction, and
lingering smell of hospital hand soap pulled
him closer to whatever he calls Heaven and closer
to what I found starving me for days and digging my fingernails,
that are no longer pink painted,
deep into my palms. Folded hands turned
to fists, and the monologue became saturated
with my blood. And I sunk further into my mattress and dug an outline
of my raw elbows, where I once placed them
delicately as a girl. For as my father deteriorated,
so did I. I let him have his "heaven"
as I questioned where it is he'd linger after this life.
If his soul would hold hands with his mothers in a
white world of no pain, or if it would stay trapped in his ribcage,
awaiting the inevitable decomposition of flesh
and life, until maggots came to gnaw on his disease-ridden bones
and kiss his soul one last time.
So I don't kneel, and I don't fold my hands,
and the last time I guided them from the forehead
to my sternum, and across my chest for the Holy Spirit, I screamed until
my throat bled. And if whatever God I was promised
holds high the life of a dead man walking,
then I will rid my mind of the monologue completely,
flip my mattress to ease my body away from the
indents of my elbows, and swallow each cry
with the thick, burning taste
of the abandonment
that has been granted to me.

graves are the same size as twin beds

I pull the chunks of fresh dirt
out of my eyelashes as I push myself
up to the heat of sunrise. Twelve nights
I've spent sleeping atop your grave.
Rolling over, I tend to the cut across my left breast,
serrated skin from the blade of a butter knife.
Two nights before last, I took the dulllest one and
attempted to carve the pulse and feeling
out of my chest, bleeding out onto the sheets
and pulling the chunks of my heart
out to bring to you, hoping that plunging
the flesh of my longingness for you into the roots
that are forming above your body will
resuscitate you and bring my lover home.
No matter the amount of blood and
tears I saturate into the dirt, your skin still decays
and sometimes if I'm quiet, I can hear bugs burrowing deeper
towards you, awaiting the feast of your
milky flesh and flushed cheeks.
I know that cutting my heart out and planting
my veins alongside the yellow peonies
surrounding your tombstone won't bring breath
back to your lungs or press your
body against mine, but as I lay over you
sometimes I dream that you crawl back
up to me, leading me home through the morning
dew to our home.
To our life.
Though when the burning of the dirt being baked into
the wound on my chest wakes me every morning,
I am alone. And your skin has sunken deeper
into your skeleton, becoming acquainted with
the white cushion of the coffin.
So I cover the slice across my chest, walk home,
and count each hour until sunset
where I will come back to you,
and water your grave with the crimson

yearning that pumps through my veins.

opening night

Crows picking at garbage, flooding dumpsters
with shrieking, gutting taut white
bags of receipts and food scraps. Squealing
with joy when the innards spill out, banging
wings on dumpster walls, ringing a triumphant song
and allowing neighbors to come see the show
of sharp beaks shredding and screaming,
fishing for flesh
in the graveyard they call home.

perishable goods

One winter, one time
I remember a transformer on
some road only four people
ever drive down bursting into flames.
Wires melting onto wood
and fire swimming through
the cracks. Neighbors gathered
below the bellowing orange beast
and mourned what was not
yet lost in fear of what
was to come. And the power went out,
leaving lips cracked and palms
tucked under thighs.
Six of us sat in separate rooms
as the house was draped
with the cold, pressuring blanket
of a dark silence.
My parents upstairs in the bedroom
with the light brown furniture
that looked like it could be plastic,
but you could never truly tell because
Kids weren't allowed in mom and dad's room!
But what we, the kids, do know to be true is mom lays
on her right shoulder, dad on his left
one facing the window, one the door, bracing
for icy isolation in the bed of what we were
and are to believe is love.
Three kids, now adults like myself, too,
sat in each room to the left of mom and dad's.
Whether they sat awake tucked under quilts
replaying the scarlet flames that painted
black skies, or rolled into the divet in the mattress
once created years ago and rocked themselves
into the winter night, they lay alone in
rooms adorned with loves forgotten.
I sat alone on the kitchen floor
and stared up at

the shelves of the fridge and
wondered what would happen when
these things begin to freeze.
If they would freeze before me,
if the skin on my hands would
begin to darken and crack
before the spinach leaves
would curl up, pulling
corner to corner and inching
for warmth before adhering
to the cold glass plate beneath,
clinging to another fragile
being in hopes of only shattering together.
And I wondered if the milk would
curdle, or turn into some sort
of terrified frozen sludge and climb up
the corners of the plastic jug,
begging for safety before
before shrinking back
down to the mold of its owner.
And I think of the potato soup
and the Tupperware container of
stir fry from dinner a few nights ago.
The eggs and the butter,
and I wondered when the peppers
would rot and whether or not
the seeds would shrivel up
and fall out, claiming their last moments
as their own. Or if they would burrow
into the green skin and find home
in the arms of their home and lover,
before hardening up and rolling
on their backs to endure
the persisting cold.
I thought of the mustard,
the sliced ham, the bottle of wine
my mother bought me that I never drank.
And my hands are shaking
beneath my legs,

and I imagine lungs shrinking
the same as berries do,
shriveling up and freezing solid.
Looking nothing like they
once did, something completely
different and dull.
And the blueberries on the
top shelf won't freeze but they'll
rot, growing a green and white
fur in a last plea of warmth.
And the cold persists, bodies
tremble as they bare the cold far
from companionship,
in rooms that consume independency,
shaping a path for lovers
that will never arrive.
And I stare at the berries
as they begin to disform.
Fingers and toes begin to turn blue
as I lay on the kitchen floor
staring at the berries.
One day they won't be anything
but a cloudy mush of mold
and taut purple skin,
discolored and damaged
and dead,
alone.