

## Hiking Devil's Courthouse

The woods are dark and deep  
but I wouldn't call them lovely.

quiet. quiet.

The animals make no noise  
but I am no animal  
and my breath rasps,  
deafening in the stillness.

The trees stand tall and still,  
sentinels whispering a susurrus of secrets.  
They reach higher than I will ever reach.  
They are older than I will ever be.  
Their roots stretch deeper than my bones will rest.  
I am not welcome in their shade.  
Every soft crunch of my boots  
on needles screams

interloper.

This place was sacred once  
and it has not forgotten,  
pine trees pining for days past.  
Strangers came and called it the devil's  
because they did not understand.  
I don't understand,  
but I do not linger in this place.  
I know whose woods these are.

## **Cold War**

The wind whispers the dry leaves above  
and runs its frigid fingers through my hair.  
I hold a book in frigid fingers of my own,  
left gloveless in my rush to escape the house.  
I drown in familiar words, longing to escape myself.

The ropes of the hammock creak and whine  
as I idly rock myself back and forth.  
It was supposed to be put away two months ago,  
but it was abandoned, a sanctuary for  
me forgotten at the edge of the yard.

The late November air burns my lungs,  
my breaths billowing out like gunsmoke,  
each rise and fall creating a susurrus  
as my coat shifts. Like the leaves it  
whispers pleas to be carried away.

My ears ache and my cheeks are blushed  
blotchy and stinging from the cold, but  
I will not go back inside to warm air  
made stifling by the silence  
of mutually assured destruction.

## **An Ode to Freddie Mercury (Cat)**

I've never seen a broken mercury thermometer,  
but watching you rolling  
on the floor, gray fur turned silver  
in the sunbeam, as you try to lick your armpits,  
I feel like I get the gist.

You bobble down the hall,  
each paw as heavy as footsteps  
on the creaky floor.  
You are on the hunt.  
The flutter of my skirt against my calves  
your prey.

You crouch, tail twitching,  
ears pressed back and eyes blown wide.  
Then you spring. Pouncing with a wumph,  
claws extended.  
I become your namesake with a startled,  
“Ayy yo!”

## Dishwasher

I am watching my father overload the dishwasher  
and I am saying nothing.

All the cooking knives have gone dull.  
They ought to be hand washed but  
he piles them haphazardly on the top rack.  
I used the butcher knife to cut potatoes on my tiptoes,  
palm pressed into the top of the blade,  
fighting with all my strength to split the tuber  
while my father sits in front of the TV  
and asks why dinner is taking so long.

The wooden spoons also should be hand washed.  
They have all split, with large cracks in the grain  
splintering as I try to stir ramen noodles in the scratched center  
of what were once nonstick pans, rendered useless  
by my father's use of metal spoons.  
When I unload the dishwasher, I will throw away  
one that has gone green and slimy with mold  
from where the wood sat damp for too long.

My father is talking to me,  
saying his happiest memories are of me as a baby and how my mother is manipulative and  
he is depressed and he needs me to cook and clean because he hurt his foot and to get a  
job and to get a different job so I can work remotely from his house and to talk to  
him more and stop talking to him about my major or my interests or my anxiety  
and to read more serious books and to stop talking about literary theory and  
how I need to respect his schedule more and tell him mine and how I need  
to remind him of things I said a month ago how was he supposed to know  
it was important to me and to ignore my cousin for being toxic and  
ignore my grandmother for being toxic and ignore my aunt for being  
toxic and ignore my mother for being toxic and **ignore myself for  
being manipulated by toxic people and to stop having panic  
attacks and and that he loves me so much how could he hurt  
me if he loves me so much *how could I even say that***

and I am watching my father overload the dishwasher  
so full that it can't even clean the dishes anymore  
and I am saying nothing.

## Teen Rebellion in a Small Town

*“You spent half of your life trying to fall behind.  
Your ears in your headphones to drown out your mind”  
- Regina Spektor*

The wetlands park closed at sunset  
but there's a gap in the chain link fencing,  
a worn path of convenience proof  
that I am not the first to seek refuge here after dark.

The August night air presses heavily against my skin,  
humidity and sweat sticking my shirt to my body.  
My elbows press into the railing of the boardwalk  
as I stare out at the stark brownness of the marsh,  
shaded gray by the moonlight.

It smells. A rancid combination  
of fresh mud and rotting fish  
so cloying that I can practically taste it,  
like bile in the back of my throat.

The moon reflects on the oil patches  
that freckle the water surface, turning them  
pearlescent. It also shines on the beer cans  
tossed carelessly into their brackish tomb.

The grating whine of a mosquito hums by my ear.  
I swat at it halfheartedly. I know  
by the time I gather the strength to go home  
my body will be pockmarked with their bites,  
another thing about me for my parents not to acknowledge.

If this were a movie I'd probably be lighting a cigarette.  
It's not a movie, so I make do with blasting a song  
through my headphones with angry guitars and  
screaming vocals to shut out my thoughts.

A flash of movement catches my eye.  
A great blue heron stands at the water's edge.  
We regard each other for a moment before it takes off,  
skinny neck scrunched, in search of a better place  
to fish. I stare after it, wishing for silence.