

Cocoon

I remember when my bedroom was the bathroom.
We would wipe out the tub, pile blankets and pillows.
The faucet with a leak, inches from my feet.

Later—between trailers—we had that single room apartment
with one bathroom for all the tenants. Outside to the left,
past the other doors, other sounds, other smells.
Television screens flashing through broken blinds.

My bedroom was the space between
the floor and the bottom
of the raised wooden platform.

Cracks between slats.
Your mattress showing through
as my flashlight found adventure
in that threadbare carpet.

And remember the tent? In the backyard of a woman
we'd never met, and how long that lasted?

So much longer than we'd thought. And oh,
the way the air would leak from our sleeping pads
as the cold from the ground seeped
into our bones.

By then I was getting bigger.
Such relief when we went further
from the good part of town.

Rented a motel room.
Had our own microwave for ramen.
We each got a separate bed.

I was seven with my first bedroom
but soon we had to rent it out.
I got the hallway on the ground.

I could never go to sleep without
getting up and double-checking
the deadbolt on the front door
inches from my feet.

Wild

I brought an apple pie on thanksgiving.

My father tasted it, his eyebrows raised.

“Wild,” he said, swallowing.

It must have been the hint of cinnamon,

The coarse sugar,
Lack of lattice.

If it isn't

meatloaf
corn bread
chicken thighs

It isn't dinner.

So my life then, so far from

ketchup
honey butter
char lines

Lifts his eyebrows further with every passing decade.

Every year without vision insurance, 401k, Roth IRA.
Every year without children or marriage or mortgage.

“This isn't how my mom used to make it.” he says, declining a second piece.

He doesn't want my pie,
Wants Dryer's low-fat vanilla,
Hersey's chocolate syrup.

Doesn't want to read
~~my writing.~~
Wants
Facebook and Hallmark in the evenings.

Wants the spin bike in the spare room the
Security camera turned on
The door locked
The blinds drawn.

Wants a son with a job
goddamnit.

I take a bite.

The hours poured in pay off as I savor the delicate flake and subtle hint from two spoons apple butter thrown into the mix taste the lemon juice and zest taste the warmth and the chew every fifth peel left on can I just say one thing—

I've seen you pulling at a catheter faking a bowel movement convinced you'll get an early release seen you sobbing and angry and in pain lonely in a crowded room of step-children watched you wheelchair through ICU hallways asking names and telling jokes and—

It truly is a miracle,
That we're sitting here, even.
Even after everything.

Wild

Skipping Stones***I***

There is a misconception, I think, that a poem must have weight.
that it must contain a gravity sufficient to sink below the surface
like a rock
skipping
its arc shortening
the contact more frequent with every colluding ripple
whispering in circles the plot to sink the ship.
as if only in the plummet does the stone
prove its worth.
as if only at the bottom can it finally stop trying
to be something like an insect
or a bird.

rest here with the greats now
you have touched the unknown depths

left your freedom and your levity
for a place with the immortal.

II

but watch the way the current helps it tumble
as it softens and the sharpness starts to blur.
the stone is set free.
a prisoner in a graveyard
released into the wild.
feel the spray of the rapids as the edge approaches
and momentum pulls you downward
flying on a waterfall.

III

Having tasted air like that could you ever go back?
it's hard to fathom floating high amidst the clouds.
but people do it.
often, sadly.
so do poems, so do stones.

Re: Brenda

She played the tambourine. She played the tambourine wearing all black, a storm. Black were her lips, penciled like her eyes. Black and shimmering with sweat and the happyangry tears of too much drink. She would scream like Janice Joplin, pelvis thrust forward, her hipbone the stretched goat hide waiting, taut, for her own rhythmic thunder. She would strike on the one and the three then switch to the two and the four as if the kick and the snare were two lovers and in her violent song she remained undecided. I never loved her. Never wanted to press her warm palm to mine. Never wanted to stand with her, swaying in a darkened corner while she sang to us, she, two places at once, somehow able to hold me and the microphone; whispering to me while she screamed to the crowd. I was twenty then. She was nineteen. Her husband was fifty eight, ever in the background, never dancing, never reaching his arms up toward her shins like we who laid ourselves before her, her black red carpet. And when she finished she was crying, croaking a bleeding thank you or a fuck you and goodnight, something odd and slightly off and memorable. He would walk forward, stooped and plodding, carrying her leather jacket or her cigarettes or her hat. She would step off the stage to him, hold him. In her one hand, cacophonous, my chest.

ship in a bottle

there are times
two
sometimes three
in the morning

when I close
my eyes
and picture
you

sailing across
the Atlantic
nineteen
and beautiful

afraid of
everything
your face
a stone

in Brooklyn
a century ago
modeling painting
smoking drinking

then
later
five children
with five men

my mother
the last of them
she too
setting sail

across the continent
in Los Angeles
modeling painting
smoking drinking

and writing you
always wrote
so she
always wrote

you
about her
she
about you

beautiful
daughter
tormented
mother

lovers leaving traces
like holes burned in rugs
or left in walls
from cigarette or fist

and of course
children
adopted or aborted
miscarried or avoided

some of us survived to
tell a tale
or sail across
the vastness

the bottle
the buoy
the cage

always there