

Chicken

The summer my dog is dying everything looks like a body to me. In everything I see this landscape, my skin, her failing bones. That summer, I carve forty-eight pre-roasted chicken breasts.

I separate flesh from bone and set them aside for my dog. Every day brings a new deterioration, another little death. Her bones exaggerated and peaked under the thick fur, too stiff for her to raise her head. I come home from work and clean away the neat turd she has left, wipe her down from the piss she has been lying in. The smell of urine is impossible to remove: it seeps into the wood, becomes a part of the house - I smell it in my hair, under my nails. Her body is too large for me to lift so I roll her slowly onto her other side and as I clean her, as I talk to her she watches me, patiently. She is alert, aware. So there is this chicken, and I am hunting out these bones.

Some nights when I cannot sleep I come downstairs to sit with her, and put her head in my lap, and wait. In my mind I map the chests of these birds: so perfectly full, the smooth curve, then the depression in the center - a seam of two halves meeting.

These summer nights, standing in the kitchen while I draw a knife down the center of a breast. Summer nights slipping my fingers into the greasy cut and peeling away each neat, white layer of flesh.

I learn to chart anatomy along fault lines - how it feels in my hands, coming apart. I lie in bed and run my finger down the center of my chest. Imagine peeling back the breast, the waist, the belly.

The day I return from the vet the house is empty and the smell of urine still lies sinister and sweet under everything. The emptiness is palpable, the air is thick and heavy with it, with the smell of the roast chicken, waiting to be carved.

In the kitchen, after paring everything away, I hold the little cavern of bone and tissue up to the light and there, inside: cathedral arches of blue ribs and vertebrae.