

## still waters

### I. church bells and runoff

i was never baptized, but i like to think that storms on friday evening  
can wipe me cleaner than jesus ever could, before i knew that  
pew time meant the swallowing of droplets unshed  
as unbelievers we stood in a desert of fish hooks on jawbones  
yet could never ask why our altar of sins  
bled bright red.

### II. a drowning at the kissing grove

saturday mornings turned us into bog bodies  
facing an early embalming, a citrine storm enough to bring us  
to our knees, no, we never knelt for anything but a game of hide and seek  
with nowhere left to run, i found a nice hiding spot  
at the bottom of the lake, just upshore  
just above the run off, just in front of the overwatered grove  
where you sunk heaven to me.

### III. the baptism

sundays were as clear as the days before the flood  
but you knew that in puddles, our emulsion will sit still  
in decay, two consciences compromised  
i can still hear remnants of consonants  
of your righteous, trembling covenant

*You're too clean. Give me back my lost time. I tasted my grandma's candy for the first time in nine years, let me tell you about it. Can you give me just a little bit of grace?*

who knew that when the storm settles,  
memories of a child and her groom tasted like molasses?

### anatomy of an orange

before she became a doctor, my mother would tell her sister that the juice vesicles inside of an orange were human cells the naked eye could see. she was only half-wrong – the cells of an orange are much like ones that compose

#### I. exocarp

you and i wear skin which peels itself away  
before dawn, without a warning, our unstitched  
grotesqueries, no more beautiful than the rotten flesh  
of yesterday, still faultless as nectar.  
does the mosaic inside of a mosaic ever wonder  
who her creator was?

#### II. pulp

visits from the bugs are more charming than they seem. i tell myself the homes of soil they leave behind are  
  
tart as the bridges i'd built across my nose, bones harvested  
to run down every vertebrae, weights of tendons  
with ten dents each, darling  
i think the bugs are starving and  
want more sweetness yet.

#### III. seeds

some core beliefs i'm not sure where i absorbed: absurdity as a concept is as binding as it is freeing. i don't think  
my left lung likes me. i fear not knowing who i am without the imprints of people in their graves. but i know this  
much to be true:

it would take more earthquakes, perhaps a few untouched  
calamities, saccharine enough to scatter my seeds apart  
to bleed my juices dry, to feel the difference  
between myself and the you in me –  
what a tragedy that would be.

## Tether

[noun: a rope, chain, or similar material used to fasten an animal to a fixed object, limiting its range of movement. the utmost length or limit of ability or resources. to fasten or confine.]

rules of monticello lane: don't kiss any more girls, drink wine sparingly, both of which convinced me i was a devil in human clothes, at sixteen, i used your cruxes as my crutches  
seventeen, you sent us in a tailspin down a landslide, tongue tied the tales you spun taking my chest for a few tumbles forward, or maybe it was backwards  
i can't remember. amnesia was only funny at first but not anymore, not now, not since you became what felt like eighteen degrees too cold.

*whatever you do, juliette, don't get caught and take me with you. Overcome. okay, but did you know promenades around the block are good for manifestation? i swear i got in because of my hot girl power walks. Overcome. i think i only look for love in places where it never existed and end up convincing myself that i must have been too ungrateful to notice it in the first place.*

i never said that last part, but i knew light was fought for and lies given freely  
not knowing the difference, i got into accidents i don't speak to my parents about  
but for a shot of caffeine, a bruise in the rink  
a kiss in the park, i realized far too late what i did must have left  
a mark i can recite and retrace, i swear i'll erase all the heroines  
i became in my head, back East, up North, where i couldn't hold them  
any tighter than i did, one more chance to figure out why  
my neighbor never leaves her basement. i'd always leave a light on  
in case she never gets any sun  
(the one in the west coast) of which i'm sure will turn me into a better  
mother. can i go home yet? did i turn out okay in all the cold?

**conversations you hear on a swingset**

on playgrounds, my sister pretends to know how to whistle  
and i pretend i know how to withstand

*can i tell you something?* can you keep a secret for me, izzy?

[i pinky promise not to tell mom], we say

*i swallowed my loose tooth today* i'm losing everything in a month  
*and i made a new friend, her name is anna* and i haven't told my friends we're moving  
*we did cartwheels in the pool, should i try them* does the sea know i'm drowning

[on land?], we ask

[are you scared?]

*what if i forget how to kick?*

to forget them? i should write a memoir

*then you're gonna need paper, 姐姐, lots of it.*  
*can i try pushing you this time on the swings?*

[i promise you won't fly so far you fall.]

\*姐姐 = a Chinese term of endearment towards an older sister

## **whale fall**

[a whale fall is the phenomenon that occurs when a whale dies and sinks to the bottom of the ocean, where it becomes sustenance for deep-sea organisms.]

how does one tell the sea they are drowning on land?  
i have swallowed far more than false prophets, a proud man or two  
in my unwilling birthplace, now unknowing hearse  
not meant to hold this much mass, certainly not my beastly  
underbelly of lyres, sloped shoulders priced with reckless abandon  
did they know that too much time is a rather unkind sore, and  
just as much a wound as too little? the farther down i sink  
the more they measure my skull: *you've got a sturdy soul, quite aged  
perhaps, but ablaze.* to float idle became less a privilege and more  
a fear, even leviathans were now too small when feeding a sea of takers  
i knew no difference between carcasses and ballasts, only  
to unspool my spine for the blind and let the hagfish thread  
my name through their teeth, liver spilled for hardened stars  
somewhere above, the sun gnaws the surface  
and no scavengers will ask if my bleached sinews were once beautiful.  
in this womb, pitch black and purified  
nobody hears a whale falling.