

**“SOMEDAY”
SIXFOLD POETRY SUBMISSION**

RETRIBUTION

a priest finds his lover in the dark
lays them down on the driftwood shores
between battered pews, whispers *father forgive me*
but the bones of fish are witness
to a love greater than God's

where in spiteful heat
years later nothing grows
but rain-starved our priest
in sermons still tastes salt and water

walks through concrete pastures
with broken shoulders, arms spread to embrace
the houses slanting tired towards the street
in their cruelty, children rip grass from backyards
knowing the earth is more flat here

here, where there is no sunset
as he unravels, slowly
empty of everything but sand

SKIPPING STONES

We shared the same childhood religion
blowing ladybugs off our fingers for good luck
and jumping the last step down to the boatyard
we skipped stones there together in the bay when it lay
flat as holy water.

I taught you how, but you were better,
finding the right stones, thin and sharp
there'd only be four or five good enough a day,
rationed by something unseen

maybe even the ocean itself
but it was good like that, in pieces
what we got we blessed with kisses, one each
you grinning, gap-toothed, lopsided
but you didn't have kid's fingers even then
the only part of you that wasn't messy.

I remember my sister's dress, she had just outgrown it,
snapping around your knees like the ship flags do
wet sand clinging to our sunburned skin—
I could've brushed the sand from your hair,
I was tall enough.

You wound up, holding your breath, one eye closed
and snapped out your wrist like a gunshot
blip blip blip endless over the bay
making birds out of nothing
and I was jealous, sick-jealous, my palms sweaty
hating my own *blip blip thunk*
no matter how long I stayed, long after Rosie called you home
tugging at your fraying braids, shaking sand loose like a halo.
I stayed until I could kick the wet stars out of the water
hating my cold kid hands—just *thunk* and *thunk* and nothing,
not even a splash.

So I rose with the sunrise and went to the shore alone
cut my hands open, turning up rocks
and amassed an innocent fortune—seven perfect skipping stones
the fever growing inside me a wet stain
like moss on the rocks mother said we couldn't climb
where a child had once slipped and drown
a sea offering, but I was not thinking of the ocean as I bled into it
or when I threw those rocks back into the water
so that you couldn't have them.
You cried that day, dressed in all yellow,
the burnt skin peeling around your nose and mouth
empty sand running through your fingers
and the gulls screaming murder over our heads.
You cried like the world was ending,
pressed against my shoulder
as I brushed back your hair,
and felt, for the first time, like a king.

HERITAGE

Mama, you never loved me
you didn't know how,
you were born empty.

The crows would come to your window
where you sat, unmoving, like your mama before you
skin cold even in the sunlight,
your hair shining like oil.
They pecked at your bloodless hands
until I chased them away
and you would smile.

I could hear the rain inside you on a clear day
when you pause, sometimes for hours
your hands floating in the kitchen sink
an ugly shape in grey water, gone flat
until I pulled you away
dried the scabs across your knuckles
and put you to bed.
I'd stay a moment, touch the surface
wonder what you saw
if someday I'd understand.

I dream about what it was like
to drift, unborn, in the darkness of you
the loneliness
the only thing alive for miles
my infant lungs, taking in your stillness,
we shared everything,
and I was born quiet
so quiet they thought I was dead.

I plant seeds at your grave every spring
where the crows wait for me
knowing nothing will grow.
I hold my hands out for them
as I feel it move inside me
a quickening, the beginning of something
knowing someday I will be in the dirt besides you
besides you and the crows
where a girl will plant the seeds for us,
wordless.

THEOLOGY

god made us in his image
dad tells me, which I think to myself
is selfish
but all the grown-ups I know are selfish
so maybe its true

mom lets me stay home from Sunday school
her hand cool against my forehead
a perfect fit
I want to say something to make her stay
fever pulse in my temples a low drum
will I be in trouble? I ask
she smiles soft-like, her hand warming
no she says god is everywhere
why go to church I wonder
but by then I'm asleep

at dinner my sister pushes me down the last step
and I trip on my untied shoelaces
god, she laughs, what a loser
but she's talking about me
I wipe my runny nose on my sleeve
knees stinging, holding back tears

the neighbors come over for barbecue
bringing two red coolers, one with soda
but mom says I'm sick and can't have any
dad hands me one anyway, winking
but it feels wrong
so I bury it in the garden when no one is looking
smiling because now I have a secret

dad and his friends are talking loudly
but nobody looks worried yet
so I lie back in a patch of sun to listen
the fever slurring words together sometimes
jesusfuckingchrist
it has a nice ring to it
I try it out under my breath

it gets dark real slow
little fireflies popping into existence
tiny sparks of stars
glowing like the embers in the grill

dad waves me over
his teeth reflecting bits of light
my son, he says, hasn't cried since he was six years old
and all around the men nod to each other
humming deep in their throats
like exotic birds
son, he says, get yourself a goddamn beer
jesusfuckingchrist

I walk over to the other cooler
where my sister sits, rolling her eyes
and grab a wet bottle
a dozen eyes on me as I take a sip
a round of cheers
dad pats me on the shoulder

even god clinks his beer against mine
real floods for real men he says
that's a good slogan I think through the fever

I want to ask him what he's doing here
but he looks kinda lonely
so instead I lead him over to the garden
he nods gravely

that's a good secret

ROCK FALL

we're flinging rocks at the sky to see where they land
but someday we'll know everything;

lightning used to be a killer
before our mass internal exodus
returning to the caves that spat out the first of us
womb-sticky, a rock in both hands
our prototype hearts, the *Uhrherz*, flushed with blood
a thing we had not invented words for yet
and looking back, maybe never did
but even now tearing down the gods of our ancestors
building metal cases to replace the sun
I see from my place in the dark a child
pry the window edges open with the blade of a butter knife
and stretch his hands out into the light
feeling the first tug of worship
nothing else needs words

you and I walk the winter German mountains in silence
to find the bones of my mother's mother
to know why they were her bones at all;
in the brittle mist of animated oxygen
the trees lean as close as we do
so close that I can see the traces of the child you were
picking up a lost feather or a pine cone
none of them special
just one of a thousand thousand things
I could wrap my hands around
above us, the constellations hang low and heavy
a celestial harvest, as if the right words could shatter them to
glass

a warm rain of stars;
you lift me onto your shoulders, my wet boots
leaving black marks on your jacket, huge gaping wounds
but I come down from you with nothing
not even the moon

a shower of ordinary rocks wakes us
you take the worst of it, lick up your animal copper blood
your mouth a lake of cold American pennies
shallow harpoon cuts in both arms, unbending lines
where I stitch you closed with frosted pine needles
we leave a cranberry trail in the snow
and for three days I can taste nothing but salt and spit
my own swollen tongue
until you collapse, barely breathing
the pool of cooling blood in your chest turning tar black
black as the mountain caves where we came from
in the dark, before we had eyes
before we had bones to dig for
you wonder, eyes closing, if I've found what I came for
I pull a rock the size of my fist from inside your body
but if it's the size of a fist, it's the size of a heart

did you throw this rock? did I?
I collect the others in a circle around us
you press one against each eyelid
singing strange death hymns, maybe not hymns
maybe not death
maybe not even sound