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Nothing is pain like watching something age.
I remember the family dog, standing up slower
arthritis in the back legs.
It made my rib cage raw, but
my family told me it was something that just happened.
So when dad began to fall asleep before 7,
call out of work and miss dinners
I wondered how comforting it would be
if he was told it was just something that happened.

The doctor did that for me,
after we rushed dad to the hospital,
when we found him passed out in the bathroom.

I wonder how the dog did it for so long
every
 single
 day,
the stiffness in my legs ached where it never had.

Never more than in these years
do I want to be a time traveler,
see how my dog managed so long,
say goodbye once more,
get practice for the future.

This is not about saying goodbye,
I'm not ready yet.
There will be a day when you are too tired
to make it up the stairs,
so sleeping at the bottom will sound good enough.

I was always awake in my room
when you carried the dog up to the kitchen in the morning.
You taught me to lift idols up
so I will.

They Used to Talk about Burning Cities

My parents used to talk about a burning city at dinner
as a metaphor for my brother.
The legs of the glossed wooden table rose up in four points
and made the oak outline of a battered cornered coffin.
The horizon was on the other side.
It would always roll back towards the sink.

I heard my mother and my father talking.
I can't remember how sick anger made me,
or if any medicine was strong enough.
I wanted to think about their ability to forget him,
and how their stone faces pushed mercury up my thermometer,
but the grinding of teeth and a mortar and pestle drowned out my thoughts.
In children's stories they shipped medicine to cities that were in trouble.
The medicine never made it to cities that burned in the night.

Everyone forgot about the city.
I wanted to journey through its departed streets,
to laugh at films that never stopped playing in empty theaters.
Mannequins in ruined buildings, avatars for dust and charcoal skies.
Burnt out dance studios where beautiful pink people had pirouetted.

My father would go to the sink to wash his hands after dinner.
He scrubbed his fingers and palms until the red, raw flesh looked like blood
creeping out sore skin.
Nobody else ever noticed, they didn't care about hands or the city these days.

I wish I could visit, but the subways don't run there anymore,
the routes were all crossed out with permanent black ink pens.
Those pens always had a crimson tint when they dried.
They took the city off the map, and said:
You need to forget him.

It was only when my sickness got worse that the hallucinations began.
I saw the city, but the buildings, parks and people were back.
Laughing, I ran and crashed into him like a pile of leaves.
He scattered on a dusty breeze,
the same way that wind takes ash when something burns to the ground.

Five

I'm five,
sitting in the sunflower field outside my house
waiting for you, brother, to come out.
We have to hurry,
the sun will be home from work soon.
At night it's too drunk to be reasoned with.

Riding Into Sunsets

Cigarette casing censure
unloading out of your barrel throat.
I, stagnated rust
never saw the irony in keeping you on my speed-dial,
never thought to blame you for boring into my brain and birthing bear traps.
I know how terrifying of a trap bearing me was.

I know the agony Icarus felt when he ignited
next to the center of his universe,
a life spent soaking in kerosene.
If you ever want to know how it felt when you left,
focus on finding your breath,
and realize how long it took me to find mine to death
in your infinite inferno.

Landmine carapace, you
never realized not everyone wants to go home,
as if that could have saved us from being bullet casings
seeding battlefields.
I know backwards is four words, so repeat after me:
I still love you.

Bones & Bear Traps

It took me a year and a half to break into the chocolates I bought for you.
Eating them made me nauseas,
like your stomach, when it heaved with the morning
sickness at the thought of staying around
at least
another seven months.

You made believe my bones were hunter's traps
that'd tear your muscles, catch your blood.
When the time came you tried to pull me out
like ingrown metal.

You burnt enough of yourself,
that even after you stopped coming home
I could still smell you,
as if we were in bed on the first night,
fucking with the same passion
you had in separating yourself from me.

The last time I saw you,
I was drunk in the driver's seat of my car.
You wouldn't kiss me as you coughed into the night air.

You need to know
I didn't drive on the wrong side of the road on purpose,
there are just too many gifts for you piling up in my closet.