

In the Graveyard of Lost Pets

My childhood was a spent wing,
dog-deposited bloody on the twin bed.

Mother burned incense, nose in a book.
Father permed my hair and dropped me off

on the porch. Naked sister—
from her bucket she washed the car.

We watched *Picket Fences* and *thirtysomething*.
Mom ate peanut M&Ms but got me

plain. Bunny escaped or was
eaten by wild dogs. She would come

if you called her. The other
in my hand—pneumonia.

Over the toilet we sang:
Day is done, gone the sun,

but the eel was found alive
behind the tank, miraculous.

We were something's natural habitat,
jungly. The dog peed in the kitchen,

moved into a cabinet. I mopped
every day. I was a good mopper.

The hamster ate every single baby
after I held them in a teaspoon.

We buried her in a Saucony box, sang
All is well, safely rest, God is nigh.

Grandma shook the salt
twice. Papa pounded his fist, laughed,

sewed the dog's palm-severed tail on
with mint green floss. Superfloss.

The nanny's cat sliced my thumb
as she miscarried under my bed.

I thought I could tame what
was wild, soothe the terrified,

thought animal eyes could see
in me, sameness. Mother called

animal control. I told you, she said.
I moved out back into the magnolia,

where each branch was a room,
the top a crow's nest called the Teacup.

I couldn't see far, just Food Lion
and Little Caesar's. The dog looked up

and barked. Later, we were sent to live
on farms. He, then me.

Panderer of Hearts

If you entreat me with your loveliest lie
I will protest you with my favorite vow.

-“Four Sonnets,” Edna St. Vincent Millay

It changed that summer we danced on deck,
countering our weight to spin around
an invisible axis that blurred the others,

sweat down our backs and you leading
though I knew you wanted sometimes to be led,
my body relinquished to your pushing and pulling,

body given entirely up.
After you mentioned the soap and the shower,
said I should wear the dress with the flowers,

I began to imagine us in the garden:
bodies glowing nearly neon
in darkness among the herbs and cannas

growing wild beyond their borders,
blooms bright and worm-bitten,
releasing night-scents under the arbor.

You, hibiscus in tangles, barefoot
beside basil and lavender thyme,
body exact, smooth water lily,

genes of people who ran long-limbed
in sunlight, and me all Scottish moor,
hunched by the fire, scrubby and yearning

for warm touch, but afraid to unfurl.
The night I drank until I was brave
and called your bluff—weatherless, perched

between seasons like a swinging child—
I grabbed your ass like a man (meaning,
like I had the right to,

knew you'd let me, wanted it, even),
pulled and groped until you straddled, pinned me.
I fluttered and stretched to tongue lips

as soft as mine. You pressed in,
then fled before I could pluck you, petal
by petal. I floated weightless beneath

a spot on the ceiling where you had been.
I wasn't humiliated. I was triumphant.
I wasn't afraid of your body or mine.

I wanted them flush against each other,
curled, cleaved. Peach and pit.
You wimp, you tease, you left your words

spread across my refrigerator:
my chain wet & me ache,
show men urge, manipulate love.

Words left to haunt me in winter,
seeds you can't help but scatter.
Later, you ask by text: *Any boys?*

South 9th Street

Strange, to look back on your loneliest year
as your happiest. Daily
you walked down 9th Street hill, earbuds in,
each hand in its
pocket. Each morning dove into yourself
and came up with only
the world, all its scars. That year
you were obsessed
with the trash island, with factory farming
and topsoil,
ate only quiche & red wine, the compost
coffee grounds and eggshells.
You baked the red worms on the porch
in weak winter sun,
washed your clothes by hand, draped
the radiators in denim
and cotton and the windows fogged.

Body before you in shallow bath water,
legs walked thin
for the first time in your life, only you to appreciate
their whittling.
The boy at the bakery knew your loaf, when to offer
a taste of cinnamon roll,
a slice slathered with Amish butter or jam.

And those friends, the ones who let you disappear,
still gathered, evenings,
still discussed the shows you no longer watched
in the office
you no longer used—you preferred cafes, the library—
and really, who
can blame them going on as usual, when you kept
shining broken,
all the glinting shards making it easier
to look away?
And weren't you slightly blissful in your solitude,

not seeing them pass
on the way to a party you'd hear talk of
a week later,
romances begun and ended by the time,
if ever, you knew of them?
In the vacuum of the clamor, you were left with
your self, which
you couldn't see. The self needs a mirror.
Instead, you saw
No Impact Man, the Path to Freedom,
the blogger who saved
each plastic wrapper she'd accidentally bought.
There is always
something to take the mind: dogs, chickens,
worms overwhelmed
by the scraps of your small consumption.
So, it took time
to feel that year as happiness. Only later, in a life
swamped with input,
steeped in the stories of others, can you see
what was there:
dawn-blue cup on a white tablecloth, right
where you left it.

All I wanted was to save you

over and over How presumptuous
you might think but wasn't it you who taught me
to hook one arm under the chin
pull with the other keep nose and mouth
above the surface to use
strong legs keep moving and finally
once we'd reached the edge the specific math
of mouth-to-mouth seconds counted
hands cupping up-tilted chin
fingers delicately pinching nostril always
stopping just before life-giving breath
in a burst of laughter? And didn't you leave me
standing on the dryer to reach golden-
cinnamonfruitcrunchypebbles which
I ate in the slowly darkening room lit
by flashes of after school specials? And isn't this
after all how you taught me: to be alone
to not speak to strangers, to not need anyone?
And weren't you secretly proud of the quiet
upside-down locker room reader just
across from the lecture hall delivering
finally-brewed coffee to a friend in the third row
to the surprise of the professor and delight
of the students and sure
sometimes I was nearly drowning myself
couldn't really fix the toilet shouldn't
have been left so young with the baby
and perhaps your discreet paddling kept us both
above water and of course I didn't know
felt the full burden of your life in my arms and
see here: how we both looked up smiling
after it was over at some applause not meant
for us each expecting some praise
or admiration then the same scowl
disappointed to find no one watching
seeing we have only ourselves to appreciate
her own side of the story we sit

on the steps side-by-side breathless at our
 feat somehow unnecessary and who
could blame me now kicking off my shoes
 swinging open the hinge of my
secondhand Plexiglas survival suit or you waving
 and gasping in panic before seeing
you can touch and I have forgotten
 the song to set your heart beating

A Castaway Redeemed

From your island perch stare out
at the abyss which is a fraught thing.
Do not think of earth's seven sea turtle species
all of which are threatened. Forget the article
you read about skin diseases caused by
the farmer who provides your sweet corn.
Do not think of how quickly a body
is sucked out to sea once the head
goes under; avoid the thought
of a human chain. Though you've heard
of wars fueled by your daily commute, banish here
the thought, as this is no place for such morbid
sinking. Perhaps you could meditate on the present,
on the sound of the waves so like your own
precious breath you can't count them. Perhaps you could
distract yourself: purchase a home,
renovate the kitchen. It's a good thing you are
spirit. So poor. So frugal.