

how i cried anyway

my father and i do not look alike
at first glance, but

we have the same scar on our chins
from falling off our bikes and

leaving a bit of ourselves behind,
red bifurcating again and again in the cement,

so strange to imagine how our skin
closed hastily, unevenly

(easing pain is not the same
as making smooth again).

later, meteors dragged their pale fingers
across my thighs,

so strange how scars can also
come from the presence of something,

and how i cried anyway,
imagining acid etched down my face,

sometimes falling asleep with
my palms pressed to my ribs,

something subliminal welling up--bitter--
in a dream,

and how i woke up spitting onto my pillow.

a mi sheberach

The Mi Sheberach is sung at Jewish religious services, a prayer for healing.

for so long, i wanted to be pink,
like my tights, like the ribbons,
soft and satin.
i wanted to fit just right,
like blush fastening itself to my cheeks
and forehead when it's the middle of the night
and the sun still burns in the air,
like the last drops of afternoon sliding
off the clouds to follow it.
i wanted to be girl, to be sweet,
to be rose without thorns,
to be dress, to be pure.
i resented red in all her brashness.

i burned myself ironing a blouse
and now pink looks at me with sad eyes
scaly and rough and
now i want to be wood
to be leather to be coffee no cream no sugar
i want to be earth
to be earth
to be earth turning umber where i have spilled blood a renewal of body
but i know that when pink
has turned brown again
my body will not forget
the shape of the wound

African Mask in a European Art Museum

I was born slowly, over
the course of several days,
my body pulled out of a block of wood.

Though I did not cry,
someone held me against their face
and passed sound through the

keyhole of my stiff,
full lips.
We did this for years,

dancing outside and
growing flecked with red mud
in the rainy season.

I was the shroud for the living,
a face that did not change
as I passed from mother to daughter.

We could have gone on for
centuries like this
but now I sit in a well-lit room,

unable to blink away the blinding white,
a red stain behind my chin a reminder;
someone used to press life

into the cupped palms of my cheeks,
and now mine is the
head mounted on the spike.

Imitations

I've drawn a lot of crescent moons lately.
They litter the margins
of my notebooks, ink seeping
into paper and taking root
(perhaps when I flip back through
there will be flowers).
I carve them out of air with dancing arms
(how many times do you have to carve
something before it becomes real?).
I tuck them behind my ears, as
they hide in the coils of my hair,
whispering to me about yesterdays.
I like to think that dreams are woven from
the moonlight that describes your face at night,
scenes molded from the pooling silver in
the coves of your closed eyes.
I trace them onto your shirt,
sliding my fingertips until
your back is a map of tonight's
sky, or at least of what I can see from
here, my head continuing into
your chest continuing into the picnic blanket.

Mwape Ntesha

We do not talk about it.
Silence can be what you make of it.
She died before I was born
and they gave me her name.

The kind of silence born of grief can span continents, you know,
and in it I wondered about her.
Every name from my mother's side is embroidered into the veins
where mosquitos dip their needles to drink.

I thought of her and
each red welt that swelled and unswelled was a fight I had won
against the mosquitos and their poisoned beaks.
I did this for several years.

Her red sores only spread,
the consequence of the first man she ever trusted.
I heard several years later about
this invisible beast that couldn't be crushed by newspaper or fingertips.

He was the last man she ever trusted,
then she succumbed, before I was born,
to a beast that back then could not be crushed.
We do not talk about it.