

**The  
Bedeviled Collection**

## Warmth

It all started  
with a warm spot on my floor.  
That's why I'm here -  
a cemetery from 1858  
in the next town over.

I checked the furnace,  
the pipes, my mind,  
still warm, sometimes hot,  
always there.

“Shouldn't it be cold?”  
“Shouldn't there be a draft?”  
If it is, in fact, you know.

Moldy tombstones,  
uneven hills,  
mounds of rich, black dirt  
over perfect rectangles, machine rectangles,  
no grass.  
Single roses,  
weathered photographs,  
make me hurry, scanning the names,  
clutching my newspaper clipping.

My neighbor said  
someone stole graveside flowers once,  
a bowl of begonias  
hung next to her mother.

When the whispers happened  
at the end of my hallway,  
always there, between the last two bedrooms,  
oddly playful, happy,  
I just knew.  
I knew I would find two.

Here.  
Two tiny marble crosses  
twin brothers  
stillborn

but growing up in the next town over,  
in my house,  
where their grandmother lived.

## **The Cost of Running**

### *Things I overheard*

I woke up listening to myself  
mumbling about verbs  
and love being a fee at the ATM;  
you know, spending extra to get what's mine in the first place,  
settling for convenience.  
All of it meant nothing;  
so naturally I thought of you.

### *Things I overlooked*

I pretended not to see you  
chasing after her.  
Cute gray workout clothes  
bouncing little bum  
and your softest t-shirt with a warm,  
“Hey there! Can I join you?”  
Like you hadn't studied her route for a semester.  
She'll make a good running partner for you,  
because I'm too clearance rack for your track.

That night,  
after I saw that morning,  
your eyes turned to charcoal,  
crumbling between us  
when we spied her buying frozen yogurt.  
But I still hope your dream  
of running a marathon  
comes true.  
So maybe she'd be better for you;  
you can train by hurdling her.

### *Things I never said*

I almost cried when you got two gutter balls for me,  
just so I could win by two points.  
Your team was pissed; you just shrugged.  
I paid for that game in appreciation.

I hate you because you're smarter than me.  
The thump of a Scrabble board closing  
is something worth celebrating.

You always smell like fresh laundry,  
which reminds me of my first college love.  
But he always took me to fancy restaurants,  
not fast food runs.

I wish I could tell you  
that you're a classy strip club; cleaner, but more expensive,  
and you still give me bad service  
and a table in the corner away from the show.

Sometimes I kiss the wall and pretend it's you;  
to keep in practice  
to keep my touch  
while I watch for your shoes out my window.

## **Canning Pickles**

The right thing  
is to leave home, fully.  
Independence: no justifications,  
no unwanted advice.  
We'll have our own house,  
our own things to tend to.  
Gardens, for dill,  
parties, for us,  
recipes in boxes, clocks unset.

But doesn't it feel strange,  
so rebellious, and so frightful,  
when gone?  
Like we're always their children.  
Like we're only ever half-grown.

The long drive home,  
to their house,  
again.  
Mom is limping,  
Dad is no longer speaking.  
The leaves need raking,  
there's dirt on the floor;  
were we their employees?

So fresh is my new house,  
with unscratched counters  
and a silver fridge.  
But I haven't a pantry.

When I was young,  
with pigtails and mother's makeup,  
we'd can pickles all summer.  
The kitchen, such a mess.  
Some stains never came out.

My house is ready,  
my house will get there, in time,  
but my parents might not.  
In my home, it's just me,  
guilt, and empty jars.

## MisFortune

A few years before you,  
before I pulled double shifts for you,  
back when I got home first,  
I met a fortune teller at the fair.

“Is this the hand you write with?” the gypsy asked,  
pulling me into her tent behind the ferris wheel.  
She told me I was creative.  
After tracing the lines down my palm,  
she said I was open minded.  
And then, “Intuitive. But you don’t trust it.”

Her green eyes closed.  
“You will have one baby.”  
She said “baby” quite sexually.  
You would disapprove;  
I found it charming.

“And I see china for you.”  
China!  
I left her tent dreaming of red paper lanterns,  
marching green dragons,  
sure that I would be a great diplomat, or maybe an explorer.  
I knew she wasn’t for real. I knew I needed to stop thinking  
about walking across that whole Wall.

But four years later, I see she was right about my future.  
I see china every day when  
I carry china,  
using the big platters for our special guests,  
and the small ones for the townies,  
inside your restaurant  
outside the brown Arizona desert.

## **Gratefully, Many Gathered That Day**

I still park on my side of the garage.  
Your clothes, my clothes, still mixed,  
extra blueberries in the batter, for you,  
and mail with your name on it? Check the ledge.

They served ham and chicken wings after your funeral.  
Is this a bar,  
is this forever?