

Pistol

Momma said thank goodness
when you had the baby with
long hair and blue eyes,
and there were no more
questions to ask.

She said that everyone
deserves
 dinner
at the kitchen table
with Dad bouncing a pack
of cigarettes on his knee,
as we all look out the window
 and don't talk
much.

*That, she said,
is paradise.*

When your little girl
was born
I still called you *Sis*,
but Dad said you were something
more like a hand gun
and Momma,
she just held back tears
over the stove
as the sun went down behind the trees--

past the spot where the crows
 won't stop complaining
until next year and
 everyone wakes up again.

That night on the lake
 I watched you
in January
when it froze over for just
the first time in as many years as Momma
could remember.
 And your baby,

she was there too--

in a pink snow suit
that zipped up
all the way over
her face.

Pops didn't have his cigarettes--
and the neighbors from church,

I heard them holler out something
to Momma about you
and that *fella*
down the street

and
the crows
by the corn field,
they went on
pecking

but I just kept watching
while you stood there
holding *Manda's* hand
where Momma said

the ice
never, ever firmed.

Diesel

Nothing roared like Diesel
the night we shot him
in the head when
Sis and I were hiding underneath
blankets in our bedroom
and the sounds of the cupboard
doors opening
 and shutting,
stung.

We knew he wouldn't last
as Dad's boot steps
hit against the dirt
by the stables

and we pulled tighter,
all the blankets
before the gun
 happened
once,
and again,
and again to be sure.

In bed that night,
staring at
 our wallpaper,
we knew we still loved him
even if the bullet didn't
anymore.

But
 we couldn't feed him
in the morning

and he was dead

and that's all we
thought about
 that night.

Invitation to the Dance

There's a spot that I watch
the crows go to
when it's cold
 and they can't do
nothing they're supposed to do
and
 just walk in circles
instead.

Momma tells me not to
stay down by the
old tires
 and barbed wire
and *dirty rusted-out wreckers*,

but I do it anyway.

I think the crows know something
 that I don't know
when I see them
in their nests

pecking and hovering
and
 nipping at each other--

like Sis
 when she brought me to
the high school
and the boys all
 touched her
over her pants
 and
didn't stop rubbing
until she was crying
and took my hand,
 and we ran home
in the dark.

Every morning those beaks
on the crows
 in the nests

reach
 down into black,
into each other
and grab
 and try
and rip
for anything,
 and it's cold
and it's
 something
when they do it.

They scream and holler
 and hide their
eyes under their feathers

and I watch
and I wonder

and want to know why.

How Do They Feel?

Mom died the day before church
when Dad brought
me and Sis
 and the baby
to the store in town
in the old pick-up truck
where everyone watched us go inside

and then
 whispered.

Mr. Jack, he was nice enough
and took me into the back of the shop
where the shoes
for little girls who didn't have
much money were laid out in rows
just as nice
 as the shoes for other little girls
that did have money.

He said,
which pair do you like?

 and I showed him the shoes
that were simple with
brown soles and didn't have
any white on them.

He said those were very nice
and picked me up onto the stool
by his workbench
 and took my old shoes off
and put the new shoes on,

and I watched Sis and my Dad
staring out of the front window together
with Mandy crawling on the floor
as Mr. Jack smiled,

tightened the laces--
 and asked me
how they felt.

Away

I followed the crows one night
at sundown when I heard Dad threatening
for me to get to the dinner
table before he counted down

on his fingers
three times.

It was snowy, and the fields
were white like
nothing
and my boots sank
into the ground
and my mind was empty
and I didn't stop at the
stables, the wind break,

the ground where Diesel's
body was frozen around Mom's.

I thought about the seeds that
fell from the crows mouths
and the farmers that hated them,
and when they flapped their wings,
so did I
and they took off over the fields--

but I kept going,
into the trees,
where I saw the eggs in their nest

and I got close to them.

I lied down next to them,
and Dad was screaming in the distance,
and I wrapped my arms
around the nest

and I breathed
on the eggs
and I told them
not to worry.

