

Learning, Part I

When I knew you
we were children, you could say
but my mind's eye at sixteen
is unblinking and strong
and I remember you.

God,
do I remember you.

I remember sitting next to you
in Church
and how I could hardly breathe
I remember the photos we took
that you kept in your wallet
and all the jokes we used
as a reason to talk to each other
when we thought we could be comedians.

I remember all those sixteen year old parties
the way I was frozen
when you touched my bare back
once.

We loved
but we did not touch.
We knew what we wanted
but we also knew we were not meant
to ruin each other that way.

But then you left
and I never knew what you felt like
I thought I never would
and that ruined me.

I had to become someone
for myself.

You were already someone
but I guess you had to become somebody else
for her.

I always thought you knew everything
I let you lead me
through the world
like it was the only one I wanted to see.

And without you,
I began the colorful,

painful process of learning.

I allowed myself to cry for you
twice
on the deck of that boat
and at that diner,
when I learned he wasn't you.

I always counted you as my one regret
when I was learning
how to be honest.

When you came back
I was dizzy again.
This time we touched.
We had thrown our petals
elsewhere, long ago
in separate lessons
we pursued
in separate places.

Your breath, the dark circles
of your eyes
the way you stuck out your tongue
threw me backward
to those songs
at those dances, those parties
that backseat
where I felt so lonely.
The places I learned to forget.

And you are eager,
and interested
in hearing about
all I've learned.
All that I've taught
others, myself
all that you taught me.

I know now that I could always see through boys.
To posters, to walls
to night skies and intentions.
But you are endless.
You are like a cave,

the vaulted ceiling of a cathedral.
One that is somehow able to hold me close
one in which I hold no fear.

Because
you, of all my teachers,
are the one who taught
me how pure it is
to want.

Learning, Part II

It terrifies me
the things people can learn
to be, to do, to say.
To think, to feel.
To share.

How we slowly learn
to abandon the idea
that it's all the same.

You taught me
how to stop placing
my faith in people.
They are temples
that decompose.

And I can teach you
how to hate me.

But I can teach everyone else how to love you.

I can teach my children
how to trust you.

My mother taught me
how to remember...

and we'll wish she hadn't.

We'll wonder who taught the dogs to howl like that

until our world

is just a circle

of lessons, and our friends

are just collections

of the words they decided to keep.

We keep shrines

to the teachers

who taught us

to look up, to call each other

by our rightful names.

And we recall those who taught us

how to touch, love, protest.

Not all of them taught us to hurt.

I guess that's why

you're still here,

in this house full of ghosts

who would be proud

of how we taught sac bother

to build it: in a way that is ours.

