

Nothing Gained

My thoughts fly from my head uncontained.
I cannot cup them in my leaky hands.
They cast a wistful trail of nothing gained.

For years, I've force-fed my brain
extraneous facts formed in distant lands.
My thoughts fly from my head uncontained.

Midterm morning, buzzed on caffeine, eyes strained,
Each key term crystallizes like a grain of sand,
but they cast a jumbled trail of nothing gained.

I drag my dictionary around, keep it chained
to my ankle. I can't keep up with your intellectual demands.
My thoughts fly from my head uncontained.

I will conquer this fear of forgetting, no more pained
attempts at pretending that I understand.
They only cast a shameful trail of nothing gained.

I'm not an encyclopedia made to entertain
you. I'll take no more pitying reprimands.
My thoughts fly from my head uncontained.
They cast a blissful trail of nothing gained.

Philomen sans Baucis

I grew into me around you
my clumsy fumbling limbs
constantly clinging to your neck
they said fate made us intertwined

When you finally wrenched me off
I was stuck like that. Concave
and twisted, empty space where you
had pressed into my shape, molded.

I tried to fill the hollow
first with tears, then with devilish things
then I looked for others shaped like you
to fit my jigsaw piece.

I nestled against many, let their leaves prick
but none could make me whole again
like you could, if you crept back to me.
One day, I saw you in the sunlight

Your extremities stretched skyward
Your trunk straight, not curved. You've changed.
How little time did it take your flesh
to forget the burden of my weight?

I'm not limber like you. The dent
you left in me won't smooth so easily.
Maybe someday my skin will bounce back
and reclaim the place around it.

Until then, I've decided to keep my dreams there
Sheltered in my shade, it's safe for them.
They're bristling, little hedgehogs scurrying
in the shadows, not ready yet to emerge.

But they will crawl out and attack
anyone who would dare again to
carve into my bark.

My Body Never Feels Like it Belongs

My body never feels like it belongs
anywhere. Out in the field,
under the soft glow of dawn, shouldn't my limbs
push and pull, swing and lift with ease?
I'm still young, after all. Instead they weigh
me down like sacks of flour hung on each shoulder.
I take a whiff of the crisp spring air and sneeze.
The hay lodges in my lungs, collecting
into a tight ball inside my chest that must be coughed up.
I'm no country girl, that much is clear as the air here.
You can tell by the tender heat
where the sun singed my cheek, the puffy lumps
like sugar drops condensing under my skin
where the bugs have nibbled and sipped from my
clogged urban arteries.

My body never feels like it belongs
anywhere. Back on the streets again, my only
movement is pressing a foot to the pedal, and yet
there it is again: I'm huffing and puffing,
out of breath and I have to crank up my windows
to dispel the smell of hydrocarbons
seeping into my nostrils, hijacking my asthmatic airways.
The particularly nasty particulates launch up my nose,
tickling the back of my throat, and lodge themselves down and down
aiming for my heart. It's stop and go, as I inhale
and exhale, forcing myself to keep on pumping the pedal
and my pulse, unable to catch my breath at the stoplights.

My body never feels like it belongs
anywhere. Trying on clothes that cling to mannequin's smooth
surfaces is like squeezing a pug into a tutu. The bulges on my body
only grow with every passing day and once they claim their bloated
space on this Earth, they're hell-bent on sticking there. If only
I could slip out of this suit and into a sleeker skin. One with less
surface area, fewer folds and no globules of cellulite. They taunt me
from the mirror, jiggling as I move. But I can't get rid of them without
punishing myself too.

My body doesn't feel like it belongs
to anyone. Not even to me. My appendages end up
in mysterious places without my consent. Sometimes
I can bend them to my will. Other times they flex

out of control or refuse to contract entirely. I have bruises on my thighs, on my arms, from bumps in the night that I don't remember. I don't remember falling for anyone. I let lovers borrow my body. But it isn't mine to give, not mine to tense, not mine to control. Maybe it's better that way because I can lose what isn't mine and feel what won't last.

But it's fickle, unpredictable. One moment tense and sighing and almost, almost, almost cramped, now I can't think the sensation overtakes me, sharp and needing kneading, greedy to ruin the moment. The gasps that escape from my body in short bursts, whether in pleasure or pain, come from somewhere outside myself, somewhere I can't place, can't embody. Certainly not from me.

My body doesn't feel like it belongs, anyway. My brain does the feeling, with its tentacle-like nerve endings extending out to my extremities. You might say body and brain are the same thing, but when I press my hands together in prayer there's only one hand I can feel at a time, if you really think about it (which I don't recommend, you may short circuit and sense your mind off spinning into space), it's give or take, rightrightleft-lefttouchingright. One can touch, the other, only reciprocate.

My body doesn't feel like it belongs any more than yours does. Admit it. Sometimes in conversation words slip from your lips like fish flopping down a waterfall and you don't remember seeking them in the first place. Yet we snap back to reality eventually, rubber bands strung too tight at every moment. My body might never be content, it's constantly prodding me, demanding more: food, water, air, now to clear its throat, to scratch a phantom itch. But I learn when I must attend to its whinings and when to ignore it. When I speak to you, my body doesn't feel out of place. It's not just your gaze that does it, something clicks in my head. Seeing myself, how you see me. I really start to wonder if my body is the best judge. And as I listen for your voice, as I write on this page, as I unfurl my body for your inspection, becoming more than just my body, but my body surrounded by you, I forget about belonging and I long only for my body to be.