

*The Day After Your Birthday*

Lying on the floor like a cat, you, unhuman, so they will come and sniff you and I want to ask how you have been lost. I drive under the darkness of our mother's inherited poverty, an unexpected wooden cross on Jewell Hill, a dirt road in light so November, I forgot to get gas; there are no answers. The day after your birthday it happens every year, our mother remembers me. I give you a blueberry popsicle and you cry when she calls you. Some devil blows through her junipers, chocolate wine taken down from pantry shelves but I won't kill myself today because I don't think like you do, baby sister, you just don't seem to care. Sing tura-lura-lural, tura-lura-lai: there's a picture of her in a ballet dress and my arms fall the same way her arms did at my age but even so I will not fall the same onto hardwood floor's grit. It's just scrambled eggs up there, knots in the yarn, baby sister, it's why you won't learn how to drive. A rooster crows from the basement; sing: tura-lura-lural, tura-lura-lai; now she's just chicken shit, all the lights on at 3am.

*My Head Is A Kitchen*

1.

My head is a kitchen  
filled with smoke

breathe in burned butter  
I don't remember

what I do when I leave  
but it settles on all the windows

2.

a March night isn't necessarily evil but  
it wants to remind you of something

with the windows finally open  
the air smells like insects in a way  
that reassures the end

of winter but habits cling  
like fog throwing back high beams

and some chill  
in spring's heatwave

3.

all this grief

all this lying  
on the floor all day

like tar it sticks  
drips from the corners of my mouth

he bought ivory sheets  
when I wanted plaid

4.

and how easy it is  
to be picked up off the floor by my elbows again  
just to cut carrots for dinner at 10pm

*Bearclaw In December*

1

I still have the hunting knife  
you gave me  
although the other two were lost  
at baseball games

you loved to give me things  
anything I looked at  
New Mexico pottery and plastic trucks  
even at nineteen

back against the electric fireplace  
not sure where to look when your missing toe  
told stories of the Citadel and General Lee

glory grew a white beard and couldn't leave  
the brown leather chair

2

You and the sheets  
were made of blood spots

thin Christmas carols mixed with radio commercials  
only linoleum gleamed

I left as old people gagged in the dining room

onion rings and fried chicken  
sweet potato fries  
coleslaw

all wasted in front of hanging head  
and eyes I wouldn't see open again

I couldn't wash the salt from the back of my throat

we wait  
in a way it's already done

we all end up with our faces covered  
in who knows what

3

It wasn't you there  
wearing the clothes we picked out

they got your smile wrong anyway

we rested our arms over our heads like you used to  
in between shaking everyone's hands  
in our new black shoes

someone said I was your raging river

the drive home  
I told my sister the Carolina fog  
came down for you  
calming the funeral

the sun the next day almost like spring  
a bugle humming taps

I cried only when  
you were above that irrevocable hole

yet our great-aunt can still make us cheese toast

and we can laugh in your kitchen  
comparing dresses  
and how we're all drawn to bagpipes

I can carry your coffin  
and eat a roast beef sandwich  
in the same damn day

*Saint*

If I cry over a cat  
it means they will die

and my wet hair brushed your head

I wanted to draw how your paws were locked, folded  
wrapped in your favorite sheet

covering your face, grinning  
and open with pain

I watched my dad dig two feet down  
in a sweaty shirt

year after year  
I try to learn the way August  
shows how death

smells like cold new dirt and an old white sheet  
and sounds like many birds

*Indian Summer*

Across the third rail  
someone babbles about faggots  
and a last October wasp  
clicks against the subway light

these are the days  
I guess

of waiting  
to fix ways I thought shouldn't be like this