

When We Dead Awaken,*

we are going to discuss loss
in Jerusalem, London, Somerville,
The Planned Parenthood on Commonwealth Ave in Boston,
Iowa pizza joints with one granite waitress.
A baby is made and unmade
by a practical woman's untwist of fate.
Done then undone in the middle of the day.
To cousins and sisters surrounding, dark with cavity
it is a decision to decide, but never what
is pushing out the nipples: a child.
On the restaurant front I tape a sign:
do not fuck with the waitress tonight.
(woman, they do not tell you the approximate size of
blood clots but I will because you should know:
lemons, and golf balls, country clubs, continents,
and all the moments I was not in.)

After seven days of unwanted sleep I am assured
forgetting only happens in bed.
Outside, a squirrel has buried a great nut
and forgotten it-
the others let him die in the snow.
In sleep I dream of Sarah and Rebecca and
the daughters of Lot-
becoming adept at quitting bad jobs,
when bosses never again allowed to touch twice
male professors stop resembling Jesus Christ

Three more days and it will be called: the end of an
end. Do not be fooled. For years your body
will be moved. It will not be by you.
The world's failures walk right by our stoop:
plain sight. No need to hide.
The tricky part:
Each Tuesday morning, the trash man will try
to suck us into the abyss of the truck,
then murmur something
about a tainted blood supply.
When we dead awaken we will throw ourselves
into the jaws
just to prove we have a place there to sit.

*title from Henrik Ibsen's 1899 play, *When We Dead Awaken*

That Trip to the Keys

In the first few weeks we put sunscreen on every morning, lathering it in, thinking ourselves so clever for remembering the tops of our feet and hands, thinking we could beat the sun, which is more powerful than God in the Florida Keys.

It was so hot we would sweat off all the sunscreen as soon as we put it on, and then we were slippery fish all day. We were pink for the first two years, tender and pink. Soon we became browned and hard instead, and we looked like every other body on the island, understood how they got to be that way.

After three years under the sun, I understood that we weren't going to make it. Knew you would leave me in Miami; knew no breath on the embers could convince the fire to stay. We stayed, though, on for another month, roasting ourselves, burning down low, drinking *Cuba libres* and fighting about less important things every day. We toured Hemingway's house thirty-six times and eventually began interrupting the tour guide. We argued with strangers instead of each other. When the desk clerk at the motel lent me a lighter, you didn't say a word.

Rosaline

Rosaline came during a storm. Most of Rosaline was gone by the time she got to us, so her clothes were very loose. She spoke Creole which is not as similar to French as I thought, so I cut her sandwich still unsure of whether she preferred mustard or mayo (we had both). She ate very little and was afraid of the dogs. When I offered her a Greek yogurt she smiled and said Chobani and we had something in common, finally. The smell in the kitchen, like piss and seagulls and the *gump* in sidewalk cracks. Rosaline was somewhere between twenty-five and fifty-two. My mother offered her gin because that is what we offer in our home, but Rosaline said no.

We began to try shaking her off like dirt. I drove. The workers at every homeless shelter smiled at us with frowns and looked at Rosaline as if she were a bomb. She might have been. As we pulled up to an all-women's place in Cambridge she saw the front and the yellow edges of her eyes retracted so wide, Rosaline started yelling no, no, please, so we kept driving in the dark snow.

Rosaline fell asleep on top of all the blankets with the light on, the same way both nights. Before bed I tried to hand her forty dollars but she just looked away. When I tell this story, I say "Rosaline came," but she didn't come to us. My mother was coming out of a liquor store at the bottom of our hill, Rosaline asked directions to the Haitian church. My mother led her home. We all piled into the car and headed for the church. It was closed, because we live in an age of closed sanctuaries.

Tonight when I went into Somerville Spirits, the liquor store man asked me about the "street girl you brought home." He said she offered to suck his dick for twenty dollars. When he smirked I saw she had left her eyes in between his yellow teeth. We are not so far apart in age, he said, you and me, and did not charge me for the champagne. I did not let him hug me. He asked if my mother was single. Once home I told her maybe we go there less from now on. My mother thinks by the window all night, stirring pea soup and looking out in the dark. It is fourteen degrees Fahrenheit, and my mother keeps opening the door, saying, too cold for even the dogs, tonight.

Makeshift Eden

Opening our ribcages to the ceiling fan
letting the yellow light bulb be the sun

forgetting the mattress that never has sheets:
the old dog is asleep, our friends on the street
can wait, can wait, they always do.

A carton of juice waits too, on the floor
our buttons clock out, and suddenly, now
nothing can wait anymore.

What's Left

The wanting is gone. It once hung
on my clothes like cigarette stink,
waking me up in the night.
It is gone. This is fine.

I do pretty well. I've caught the fish
and frozen all the meat
I'll need 'til the end.
I've got a couch and a dog.

My batteries once purred and lit matches to drop
down the back of my jaw. These days
they yawn; deny ever knowing of an electron.
(The illusion is gone.)

I have forgiven both my parents.

I close down my ears
to the insistence of scientists,
statistics that things happening now
have never happened before.

I believe in nymphs
wood sprites, mermaids,
and don't want to live long enough
to be proved wrong.

There are no more apologies in this bank.
I have accepted my sins,
downplayed my goodness,
and will not acknowledge either, anymore.

The cities have leveled. They're all
the same now. The rich over here,
the milk and the cow,
I'm done with the fists and the rags.

My poems are coming out waving
white flags. Some are dead when they arrive.
This is fine.