

## **Legend**

And what of Icarus, who wanted to touch what had once been so unknowable? To say, “This is how I am thankful for what you have done with all this light. I too am celestial body, heavy with dust and so much gravity, but I could be the moon if you would teach me how to shine.” And he reached with sweat and elbow to love the ineffable. The sea beneath him a warning cry, laden with bones of better men who fell beneath the horizon. A love like this – futile and precious, destined to break the heart that holds it – is a business of never learning when to let go. Of believing that the sun is somehow tangible, even when you stand, melting beneath it. Even then, all wax and brittle spark, you are grateful to have once been warm.

**Not this grief. Not again.**

The poems writes itself by now:  
Here, a line about the body; the holy of skin;  
The brown boy and how he crumbles.  
How we raises his voice.  
How he raises his hands.  
How he lowers his head,  
But does not walk away.  
Not again.

Does not move.

Not ever.

The boy is another in a list of names I wish I had no reason to know,  
But I know them and call them as often as possible.  
The poem becomes prayer that way.  
It is a mantra

A movement

An incantation

A subtle begging:

Michael

Antonio

Oscar

Trayvon

Please,

If you have any say on who you watch over now as ghost or guardian angel,

My brother is not yet bullet point or hashtag:

Teach him when to lower his hands.

Show him how to run.

## No Sad Poems Today

The front door is dead-bolted. The screen is latched. The couch is covered with last night's clothes. The trash is full, but there is no garbage out and around or beside of it. The lamp is off; the books away; the kitchen a quiet hum of refrigerator noise, and there are no sad poems today.

There was a homeless man just at the corner with a plaid shirt and misspelled sign. He smiled almost ten dollars' worth for the five and change I gave him. I did not offer him a place on the couch or a meal from the fridge, but I locked the door – thinking of the gray and shrivel – tuning out the voice in my head that says he should be welcome here.

Hearing voices is not a symptom often saddled with this disease. The myth of energy enough to change the world at 1 am still is. I tell myself I cannot cure hunger. I tell myself not to empty the fridge. I tell myself the man is most likely an angel, who finds himself fallen from grace. The only cure for falling is to learn to get up even when you're alone.

There should be a poem about being alone, but there are no sad poems today. Not when there's money after the bills and a meal planned for tomorrow. Clean clothes. Made bed. A door that will not greet me ajar first thing the next morning when all of my strength is bidding me breathe. Praise the tiny victory.

Praise the thing for which no one knows I will always struggle. The grind of day-to-day and how there is still some fight in me. Even when the fight is keeping the car on the road. Coming home to sink void of dishes. Being thankful that guardian angels are willing to work for smiles and spare change.

The front door is locked.  
I am warm and full.  
There are no sad poems today.

## Fathers' Day

1. In this photo, the two are on the kitchen floor, pouring over her favorite book – the one with the mouse and the strawberry – and no one believes she can read yet because it's the only book she reads. She calls the words in her 3-year-old stutter, almost before she can turn the page, and she cannot say the word "sniff" well, so that is daddy's part. She squeezes his hand, and he calls it out every time it appears on the page. And they don't even notice at first when mother comes to freeze the day into what will become their favorite pictures, even after she masters her speech and the book gets lost in the move. But when they do, they are both model and flash, a mess of giggles and hysterical faces, and it goes on like this, even past bedtime, but mom nor dad nor daughter complain, and she loves him, and the floor has yet to earn its weight in blood.
2. In this photo, he is standing tall – holding on to her award – the one she got for making straight A's without breaking a sweat that year, and he did not use the word "proud" in any of his speeches. It is altogether too cumbersome to outwit his fatherly stutter, but still she knows he will buy her an ice cream and that is almost the same. And she is smiling, thinking of vanilla and sprinkles and how her teachers gave her hugs, and how they worked together to buy her a dress a to wear. And he found a tie to match. If you look closely, you can see the swollen knuckles gripping the parchment page; you cannot see the bruised eye that peered into the lens, but it is there, in her hysterical faces giving in to

the ceremony, and she loves him,  
and still believes there is more that  
she can do.

3. In this photo, there is a huge  
evergreen, squeezing itself into the  
living room; the tinsel cascades in  
its empty spaces, and there are no  
presents this year. There are still  
pancakes flipping in the iron skillet  
and even the CD of gospel carols;  
later there will be cards to open and  
the pretense of grateful to show.  
And no one is smiling. And no one  
is speaking. And no one has heard  
from dad in 12 days. And she loves  
him, and will not forgive herself for  
whatever she did to send him away.
  
4. In this photo, the two are at  
opposite ends of a brand new  
kitchen table. He is eating a late  
morning breakfast, and she is  
reading from an old book. They do  
not bother to raise their eyes when  
they are told to crack a smile; they  
have never been the kind for easy  
demonstration. Once, he tried to  
apologize for all of things not  
shown in the pictures, but by then  
she did not believe herself a  
daddy's girl anymore. And he  
slowly finished his breakfast. And  
she finally finished her book. And  
the two left the table. And she loved  
him, like a ghost that was grateful  
for its bones.

## end (and other) stage(s)

when you are twenty-five years old  
and your mother is dying  
you are not twenty-five anymore

you are four, at Easter, in a pink and white dress  
telling a congregation about the death of Jesus  
you do not understand a word you are saying  
but you know the smile on your mother's face  
and that praise is pearly gate enough  
for the itch of your tights and the pinch of your shoes  
and the speech is over before you know it  
but that grin is a chorus of kiss on the cheek  
and hug and proud and ice cream later  
this death business must be glorious  
and you cannot wait to do it

then you are sixteen, waking up in a hospital bed  
wondering why you are waking up again  
when the pills you took were weapon enough  
to annihilate the war inside your spirit  
she is straight-backed in the hospital chair  
clutching the bible like a life preserver  
before you can speak, she whispers in your ear  
*the next time you think about killing yourself  
remember you are murdering me instead*

or you're ten and attending your grandpop's funeral  
wondering why everyone is so fly  
your cousins clean, brothers crisp, you a brand new navy dress  
equal parts glee and grief hang in the air  
like white noise drowning an angel song  
all three ex-wives are present  
a taster's choice of grandpop's preference  
and no one speaks ill of the man who beat his women  
but taught his grandchildren how to tie their shoes

and somehow you are forty-one  
in a shopping mall with your teenage daughter  
she has her father's eyes and your brother's spine  
which are both an unspeakable shade of beautiful  
it still takes your breath away to watch her when she sleeps  
and she is showing you fabric swatches  
and has the nerve to call them dresses  
the patterns are wrong, the colors obscene  
the price nowhere near the agreed upon range

and you double over in laughter when you remember  
you're mother said this day was coming  
when you are twenty-five and your mother is dying  
you sit straight-backed in a hospital chair  
reminding god that she believed your lives were interchangeable  
that taking her could only mean that he did make mistakes  
your brother is planning a funeral  
you are asked to pick out a dress  
the only prayer you can remember is a decades old easter speech  
but you pray all night long

years later  
when she is still here  
you forget how it feels to be four and forty  
all at once a marvel of space and time  
there is the only the memory of her sunrise smile  
breaking across the plane of her face  
a chorus of kiss and hug and tears  
and the moment is over before you know it  
swallowed when she looks at you and whispers

this death business is glorious  
and i cannot wait to do it