

Pulp

There are hours of tonguing the loose tooth
before I decide to remove it with my own fingers.
In my memory it feels much the same
as the resigned detachment of sectioning a grapefruit.
The same resistant tug of sinews
clinging either to ivory or the fleshy meat.

It is reluctant and stubborn,
bringing with it nerves and tissue,
coaxed by a child's impetuosity.
The dance of spit and blood
in the stainless steel sink.
The tooth is a lesson.

The pulp and papery matter of childhood.
The space of wistful, smiling mouths.

Trimming

A knot on the middle finger,
formed when just a child
from gripping pencil and writing,
always writing. Here, the body altered

for the first time in an enduring way
that cannot be undone, as it grows
and calcifies over the decades.
Now littered scattershot over this

dusty landscape. A faint blemish
here where I sliced my hand open
cleaning the kitchen knife one night,

a cut under the eye with no history. Or follow the map
to this consequence of imprecise umbilical detachment.

A patch here of bedraggled forest,
dimpled, speckled birthmark.
The ohm that transcends these rough thistles

and cavernous valleys, thundering
their confidences solely, sadly to one another.
I perch on this mountain and wait
to discover a soft and small prick of inspiration.

Vessel

You would like to see a peony in your budvase,
so you consider going out to clip one
from our neighbor's garden while she is away,
yet you also see it dying quietly in its ewer,

much the same as they do in the gardens.
When you realize that they will all be gone
by the end of May, you change your plans
to rhododendrons, hyacinths, hydrangeas.

We consider what plants will thrive in the shade
of the front yard and the burgeoning sun
in the back. We consider what areas of the yard
are richest or in greatest need. We push our fingers

into the dirt together, tilling and plodding to cultivate
something poignant and perfect. Planning
what to seed and what to pull. Engineering, hoping.
What blossoms will be the result of our architecture?

Every morning now I wake
and step into our failure
of a backyard,
to drink my coffee and consider
all things unfinished.

Youth Apocrypha

I think back to my years
that were dedicated to frivolity
and hope that it is not a thing
to be throttled out of my own children.

I seek to fall in step now
behind the smoking teenagers,
not to chide, but to capture
some ephemeral part of my youth

when I sat across from friends at
barroom tables discussing stories
as though they were the only things
that mattered. Which they were.

Which they are. These toppled pieces
that lie today like ice cubes
spilled out of a short glass,
spinning wildly before melting.