

## *My Familiar*

I can't remember how old I was  
but I can remember the feeling of  
smallness  
in my throat.

my father had just caught a cat-  
innocent, I thought,  
curious of the pigeons,  
a cat that was just a cat,  
but to him

it was a disgrace to be  
what you were born to be

(I am an innate witch)

so it was obvious that the cat  
needed punishment.

he stuffed it into a burlap bag.

I stood and heard  
the scratching of claws,  
just a small thing trying to escape.

he was furious.

why did fight-or-flight senses work?

why can't insignificant creatures just stay still,

like good little daughters

who have a branding of silence on their left cheek?

so he put the bag on the ground

and his hands around its neck.

I felt my throat get smaller and smaller,

the smell of cat piss in the air.

*this is it, this is it*

I jailed tears trying to escape.  
he never liked when people cried,  
or when they happened to be weak  
and I was a good little creature.  
for that, his hands released  
and he stated his directions:  
*go back in the house.*  
I ran, coughing, my throat still small.  
vomit wanted to come up  
but had no room.  
he took the burlap bag,  
threw it in the bed of his truck-  
I heard as it landed-  
and drove away.

## *My Pollution Story*

It's selfish but still I write twitching  
this is the vial of the air  
I breathed, please take it  
here's how it became polluted, please  
listen with your ears and eyes and heart  
these particulates weren't supposed  
to be here, they weren't supposed  
to be in my lungs, see  
how they swirl inside the glass, unnatural, he  
he is the one who put them there, please stay,  
but if you must go, bring the vial with you,  
keep it in your coat pocket and hold it up  
to a candle before you sleep- never give the particles  
the shade of the night, or else they will disappear.

*They were there, he was there,*

*I was there.*

## *Your Sneakers*

I found them yesterday evening,  
a far cry  
from their original white;  
shoe laces frayed, aglets gone,  
scuffed and blatantly abused.

Dust shifted in the room  
as I let out a snort.

You were made to move;  
every day  
you'd run circles around me,  
a smile in a motion blur.

“Let's go!”

I tried, but my mind and soul  
were rooted into the soil.  
Not all of us can run, you know.

My knees popped as I rose.  
Off-white sneakers  
found their way inside  
black plastic.

I hope you got  
where you wanted to go.

## *Slosh*

I do not understand how she asks so many questions. Do all things little wonder about the things that are big? If so, why does it not work the other way, with the universe gazing down on ants with impassioned curiosity, with the universe holding its sons and daughters with peering love? But it's always the universe this, the universe that.

**How long has it existed, mama?** *I don't know, but long enough to have created and destroyed love a million times.* **How big is it, mama?** *I don't know, but big enough that we aren't afraid of losing it.* **Can we lose the universe, mama?** Yes, you can lose anything. *No. The universe is our home. It's here to stay.* **Just like our house!** She giggles while I think of a pile of bills in the drawer too high for her to reach. *Yes. Just like home.*

I am wrong. The universe has stopped and started a million times. I do not tell her this because she is the thing that makes it go. I lie to her about this broken, drunken reality. God forgive me.