

## **I am from**

the poplar tree at the creek's edge  
on my grandparent's farm  
where once my cousins and my brothers  
wanted to see who could climb the highest;  
I stayed uncommitted,  
feet rooted to the ground,  
more like the poplar than my kin.

a place where my grandmother grew raspberry bushes  
stretching from the dilapidated toolshed  
to the dusty driveway, from which  
she tasked us with collecting berries for pie;  
we'd return ashamed, buckets nearly empty,  
mouths stained greedy red.

the summers when I still slept between adults,  
too scared of the dark and too fussy to admit  
I needed a nightlight,  
nudging my grandfather's ribs with sharp elbows  
until he roused and chased me back to my own bed:  
a pullout couch in the oversized living room—  
shadows in every corner.

but too, a second home, in leaner years  
when my parents' folly wounded us,  
and they'd drive us past the butte and past the rye,  
leave us at the steps of cracked concrete, unaware  
the world I knew always grew a thousand times grander,  
even believing the creek at the acre's end  
really did stretch on forever,  
where grandpa's charred burgers and lumpy potato salad  
were an emperor's feast.

a place that bubbles up first and fast  
when someone might ask, "where are you from?"  
—there  
in my grandmother's homemade pies and  
secret cigarette breaks when she thought we were napping,

in my grandfather's snore during his,  
in a house's endless rooms of hide-and-go-seek  
and in cousins who grew faster than me.

I am

from dust, from smoke, shadows and burnt meat,  
from the juices of fruit, too sweet to not eat.

## Fucking Kierkegaard

Each time I come,

it's my mind who escapes.

I read somewhere—

in a library,  
Kierkegaard perhaps?

—that life must be spent being filled up and not emptied out  
not like a deflated balloon or dead flowers  
given at the end of a rotting relationship;  
they sit in a dark room  
for days, as ska plays, booming  
from somewhere in the apartment complex.

Everytime I betray myself

my fucking heart on a crusted sleeve

—no. The shameful roundness of my mouth (yes.)

when my eyes roll back,

my hand between my legs

or braced against a cold marble bathroom stall

I'm emptied. Empty.

When will I fill up?

once I stop asking questions I do not seek answers to

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During college, Thomas used to let me walk with him

on days after class

after library hours had ended

or when I'd find times when we would cross paths

or create run-ins like a stalker

we'd talk & talk or I would just listen to him and his honey-words

to his thoughts about philosophy

down city blocks and the path that led by his apartment

by the horse pasture hidden behind the hemlock bushes,

the horses I swore I told myself I'd ride today, that day,

(every day)  
some weird fantasy of being connected to them  
riding bareback  
and feeling the sweat of their power beneath me

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But I have passed the breakaway  
Thomas is gone,  
my thoughts of him distracted me, and the horses too.

I go back now and their enclosure is empty  
empty still  
(just as I)  
still questioning and deaf/blind

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Kierkegaard compared the cries of a poet—the ones that now pass my lips—to beautiful music, though profound anguish existed inside.

I retort:  
my orgasms are my battle cries,  
my barbarian screams to topple Rome—  
to go to war with my emptiness  
(though still losing)  
The blood-soaked fields repeat like dashes on my road home

& no more Thomas  
the horses whinnying behind me, from someplace I can't reach  
still I long to ride them, but

my act  
my acting  
my passion is  
and has always been  
weaker than my actions  
acting that I am full of

the moments when Thomas takes naps in the afternoon  
like on that one lucky day

he let me come in after walking him home (my puppy paw prints behind him)  
I could have listened to his breathing for an eternity

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But here I ache for release,

find myself in the same old places

the hot breath

the cold tile

the shit-smell of a rest stop bathroom  
hoping for someone to come in and

save me

empty me

fill me

and though they do,

over and over and over and over (and over)

I am still on the battlefield

still thinking of fucking Kierkegaard  
& the horses unmountable

still asking my same questions

*the question:*

If the borrowed me (waiting to renew)

without repeated climax,  
the shot of neurochemicals  
into a rotted brain,

can claim myself

pull the tattered shell of me off the library shelf  
open the pages

and exist

as one who is filling up for something better

as one who could ever

one day

(please?)

be whole.

## **Cœur de Fleurs**

Petals pink hurricane  
a heady, maddening perfume  
as we walk the storm swaths made by thorns;  
stiff stems atlas the folded heads of silk  
that rise from too-large vases,  
ballooning  
like puff adders to camouflage her coffin.

The light catches anthers, pollen golden,  
though the sepal leaves are midnight dark  
pressing upon the rose flesh  
like wanton talons  
desperate, unbecoming;  
“stop weeping, stop weeping,”  
I hear someone say.

There is one drying pistil  
who draws my eye  
who aged too soon, or emerged too eagerly,  
whose withered head rests weakly now  
propped up amongst the living,  
the vibrant others, giddy white  
or blushed red;

and suddenly  
I am inconsolable  
to realize  
she was the receptacle and I the bloom.  
The bouquets decomposing now,  
soft dead raindrop petals,  
the adders molting skin.

The organ swells, a final dirge,  
and we slither the same path out:  
now the littered floor,

little buds, unopened;  
crushed under shined black shoes,  
whole rose hips  
bleed into the gray carpet like spilled wine.

Mother gives each vase away,  
like prizes at the end, to  
the puffiest eyes.  
Clenched fists, the huddled mass,  
& flagged flowers are not mine:  
I am saturated  
against the devastation sky.

## **Trans Formation**

Perhaps some know the biting of their tongue  
When it has swollen wide inside their mouth,  
Imagine now the swell of body, soul:  
The given name you wish to leave behind,  
A voice of different timbre in the mind,  
A rush of blood, a gnash of teeth internal—  
    Those born inside a skin ready to shed.

Inglorious fight: To claw out through the husk,  
To paint anew with bold and clashing brush,  
Cocooned in rainbow sleep yet yearn for blooming.  
Denied by those who choose a hateful cry,  
Who'd rob a body of its phoenix rise,  
When only stone is given for the shaping,  
    The breath of lungs desires a molting form.

Though other bodies' priv'lege recognized,  
Prescribes no onus here for their demise,  
Nor pity choices made by such cicadas.  
Instead to grant by law this chrysalis,  
To new-old souls, the freedom to exist.  
At last, emerge the way an angel does:  
    With wings and light they'd always held inside.