

*My Father's Birds*

Emmylou breathes like a bear,  
her round haunches weaving through  
curtains of tangled vines  
brown with winter breath,  
wiggling herself over  
logs who are too deep  
in conversation with the  
fungi to notice her copper eyes.  
I search for the rock wall  
my father and I had once found  
a few winters ago,  
I wear his snowshoes from 1992  
and traverse the acres we neglect  
when summer comes  
weighted with snow now and easy to trample.  
He shovels the driveway and coughs.  
I leap onto the wide wall with my rabbit feet,  
Emmylou trots after the spoor of a coyote  
or a deer; tracks too caved in to  
resemble a certain foot.  
A field somewhere back there  
belonging to a reclusive neighbor  
remembers me  
and wonders if I'll find it again  
like my father and I found the wall,  
or the ancient cattle pond  
yawning far behind  
the barn that still infiltrates my dreams.  
But the bear-dog and I fade  
past the blueberry bushes  
and lay like we've won a marathon  
in the snow  
by the fence  
where all the other dogs are buried,  
sun rooting itself into my face.  
Algid nuthatches flit overhead,  
swirl around my father's aching hands,  
ease reality for the both of us.  
February clouds whisper and roll,  
sparrows trill to them  
as if it were May  
and I begin to wonder  
who my father would be  
if the birds didn't dance with him

like they do,  
or where I would be  
if they didn't carry me back in time.

*Bones*

How's your mother?  
Oh she's getting along  
fine  
(pitch the smile!  
to those clueless eyes)  
fine, just fine  
drowning in striped blankets  
but always too hot  
temperamental  
hot food splattering  
the sides of our microwave  
brand new! Daddy's money  
Daddy's hands plunging into the soil  
until that's where he wants to be, under it  
where the worms will tell him cowboy stories  
so he won't hear her  
pole vaulting her bones at him  
those bones that hurt so much  
because nobody ever bought her shoes  
well look now! She grew up and her house is full  
of shoes  
soles with no spirit  
because there's nowhere to wear them  
friends deterred  
from our backyard because the pea pods  
are overgrown, too bitter now, too stringy  
coffee stained magazines decompose  
between her ears  
teasing her neurons with dirty words  
filthy words injected via knitting needle  
into her bones  
until they glisten, slick and heavy  
and with her own bones in her hands  
she takes a perfect pole vaulting stance

*And She Let Me*

And she let me take the glass from her  
it slid from her hand to mine like lard  
she let me christen the floor  
with the glitter of glass  
I said it mattered to me if I was up at 3am  
but it was only 1:48  
I stood in front of my father as his osprey  
fought in his sea  
the floor around his untied running shoes smelled like white wine  
and my hands smelled like white wine  
and her eyes smelled like white wine  
and she let me screech at her to shut up and she said she would

6:13am I blend the grey away from under my eyes  
he and I float  
perhaps she'll punish us for screaming  
by dragging herself beside us to the coast  
so it won't just be me and my father but us  
with damp pillows stuck to our legs with salt

Each hour ends with a muffled palm to the base of my skull  
to fog my conception of her  
make me see double  
on the left there she is, my mother  
there she is, I look like her  
I've seen her in the sun for a few months now  
wearing my hair in a scrunchie  
or letting it fall around my neck the way she did  
on the right I know her just as well  
too often she paces  
on the forest floor with cinder blocks  
tied to her earlobes with gardening twine  
filters lichen through her teeth  
scrapes it into her palms  
lets him have it

When she overlaps like she did  
when I told her to shut up and she said she would  
it feels like I am in the leaf litter with her  
mottled shades of red between us  
swaying us by our heels  
and she lets me watch her with nothing behind my eyes  
and she lets me wonder who's in the forest with me

It's been two days  
3:48pm and the wine's embedded  
in the scratched hardwood of a puny kitchen  
we can't smell it anymore  
and she called him to the bottom of the sea  
and he helped me pick the leaves from her hair  
and we'll go to the coast like we said we would  
and she'll laugh in the passenger's seat

*On The Day Tom Petty Died*

on the day Tom Petty died  
I told my mom  
and from her phone I got a text from my dad  
Breton, you heard about Petty. It's a very sad day, and we're all sad,  
that's it. Love, Daddy.  
It's a certain kind of heartbreak when a rockstar dies  
because every time a rockstar dies  
my father's face comes into my head  
to the left of me  
hazel eyes on the road  
thumbs tapping to Helm  
or Frey

or Petty

on the day Tom Petty died  
I just started walking  
and ended up in a music hall  
and although I heard no rock and roll there  
something about performance space  
still filled me with the familial comfort  
that carpet-muffled floorboard squeaks and dim lighting bring  
more of my mother  
because she's the one to subject us to classical stations,  
all of the hosts with sedimentary voices like rivers,  
articulate

my father and I mumble but Petty talks slow  
rockstars have nowhere to be

every time I hear Free Falling I'm seven or eight or ten  
in the greyest, most dismal office building in Massachusetts  
but I'm shuffling through a stack of CDs on my dad's desk  
Springsteen, Creedence Clearwater, Neil Young  
and from the boombox on the shelf above my father's head  
Petty floats  
my father floats  
in his calculators and envelopes and binder clips  
but his thumbs tap the grey away

on the day Tom Petty died  
I ended up in a bookstore  
and realized there  
after standing bent sideways reading the names of poets I don't know anything about

that all the poetry ever settled on me  
was my father's  
and his poetry isn't his at all  
but Helm's or Frey's or Springsteen's or Fogerty's or Young's  
or Petty's.

Poetry began to settle on me with the first tap of his thumb  
the first car ride where a certain song came on,  
perhaps it was Doolin-Dalton or Louisiana Rain  
and simultaneously our eyes widened and we reached for the volume dial

*Something Fell*

something fell  
like the frustrating tip and clatter of  
a clumsy fan  
when mother, in a mood, deposited a  
tangled plastic bag of a grandmother's ribbon  
into the closet  
I had removed it from

my arms fittingly tired after  
wildly punching the air, her,  
from behind the bedroom door

and so the thing fell,  
and I fell to the floor next to where the dog pissed  
and the summer settled next to me like glue

feeling further than ever from an end only twelve days away  
the thing rolling, a floorboard hum