

The Scars We Don't Show

When I was Your Good Luck Charm

I wish I could forget that night sometime between July and August.
I had just come home from a night out,
feeling high off of the muggy heat and haze.
when the crash of ceramic cups landing onto the floor startled me out of my stupor.

I wish I had stayed home that night.
I wish I could have saved
myself
from seeing.

You backed into the corner between the window and the kitchen counter.
An ashen elbow up at a ninety-degree angle
his forearm around your neck,
you forcing a too-wide smile in between gasps for air.

I wish I could unsee your lips stretched thin
saliva rushing out of the sides of your mouth
rapid breath,
eyes scanning my face, assessing the damage.

I wish I had never noticed how your lips touch your gapped teeth
When you smile big like that,
trapping them inside your mouth like
two fists wrapped around your neck.

Now, I've come to connect the dots,
tired eyes and quick bursts of short laughter equal lies not worth telling.
I see *it* again when you make up stories
to cover up old fibs you told and just as quickly forgot

I wish I could forget
how you told stories about our ancestry
hazel irises filled with ferocity
and fearlessness.

"Our power comes from our bloodline,"
you'd begin
"never faltering in the face of danger,"
but crumpling under the covers of no-good men.

I wish I could forget how you handed your heart back to him
one cracked door at a time.
I wish I could remember what your personality was like
when it seemed as vast as the night sky during our Friday night strolls for ice cream.

The Scars We Don't Show

You were my big dipper.
I, your good luck charm.
You were my saving grace.
I, a ghost haunting you for your mistakes.

I wish I could have been your saving grace,
I wish you could have let me
Now, all I can remember is how you swung open the door so suddenly
as if the stars weren't in the sky long before he existed.

14. Who needs instruction manuals, anyway?

You unfold the little glossy booklet for the cloth wardrobe,
This is only temporary, you remind me.
I poke holes in the plastic bag,
And carefully lay out screws in order from smallest to largest.

One-by-one I line them up on the hardwood floor.
Like toy soldiers,
They stand erect waiting for commands.
You pour your fourth glass of semi-sweet red wine.
Together, we examine the paper-thin fabric and shallow rods.

A vertical frame and covering
meant to hold the pounds of clothes
and random knick-knacks we've collected.
Like your five inch stilettos not built for these Brooklyn streets.

Just for now we agree.
This is what we need,
a tiny attempt to tidy up a fixer-upper neither of us have energy to tackle.
We don't need instructions for this project.

"One, two, three, go."
We lift and fit together imperfect bars.
You wiggle bits and bobs,
I hold the excess material in place.

The Scars We Don't Show

Standing back, we grin revealing wine-stained teeth,
Stretching our rosy cheeks,
You bow in celebration,
I pour us one more.

I'm so dizzy, I think I'm hallucinating,
the deafening echo I hear as rods come toppling over
Until I notice the steel-toed boots stomping
and hands heavy as batons knocking them down.

One-by-one iron rods fall,
Ricocheting against your favorite heels.
Red, like the stains on the patched-up wall
before it was scrubbed clean with bleach.

Slowly, I bend down,
Avoiding dilated eyes.
You hand me the crumpled up fabric,
together we fit bits and bobs together again.

15. Buried Treasure

Little-by-little pilled sweaters and faded tee shirts are thrown in a pile.
They exist in between drawers packed too tight to open without force.
Mismatched socks in neon hues, chevron patterns and fuzzy textures take up space in a tiny compartment.
Notebooks with child-like doodles are started and come to an abrupt stop.
Composition notebooks half-filled with goals that are never completed.
Lotion bottles with greasy tops expire, get rinsed and put back in their place.
Costume jewelry rusts as it hangs on the metal stand not meant to last longer than a couple of months.

It was a cool Sunday in the spring,
We went shopping for nothing in particular and came home with a myriad of useless things.
The glass jewelry box I still have—cracked on the inside
The perfect hiding place for receipts I keep and never review or business cards I'll never use
from people I'll never meet again.

There are shells from the homeland and rocks the color of limestone.
They remind me of the big house I spent a decade in,
fingering the façade as I walked up the stairs,
The rough texture scraping the back of my knees when I swing my legs over the edge of the
stairs to look out at the dogs and humans and birds not noticing me.

The Scars We Don't Show

I would walk around picking up things that seemed imperfect,
A sweater two sizes too large, maybe I could take it in one day.
Or that other thing or that.
It's where I began holding onto mundane treasures,
Bazooka wrappers and blurry pictures,
Crochet needles that haven't been used in years.

The Scars We Don't Show

Guilt washes over me like the cloud of smoke we inhale together,
as I pretend not to see the loose skin folded under so tightly,
neat like bubble wrap
not yet popped.

I wonder if your son so innocently traces the lines
and presses where they pressed tubes and pricked needles,
prodded and nudged searching for tumors,
Spreading open the same wounds
until they fold onto themselves.

Your ochre skin
darkens around the folds,
The creases and ripples
like battle scars.

There were so many ways to hide them
Under baggy t-shirts
And sweatpants stretched at the waist.
Yet here they are made apparent.

Laying in the middle of a wide road
marked in lighter zigs and zags
The center like a sign no one wanted you to miss,
screaming, *I had cancer.*

I wonder how it feels to face death,
the thoughts slowly swirling around your mind
like blood they pumped into your veins
before and after the diagnosis.

The Scars We Don't Show

I wonder if scars are God's way of reminding us which ways to go,
What appliances too hot to touch,
The thin spots in floors to avoid.

You wear your scars
like you never accumulated them.
Like you,
mine are hidden buried under mountains of questions,
layered carefully like fashionable outfits.