

Five Poems

*Are you there, God? It's me, Emily\**.

*\*(This is a pseudonym created to maintain anonymity for the contest.)*

I have stolen the name of this poem, because I don't know how to talk to you

Any more

Any more, I don't know how to talk to me.

The eggs are cracked  
Their shells are spent

There is only one way to be whole  
And so many ways to be broken

Why did you make it that way  
Those ways  
Why did you make it?

At all

At all, I am not unbroken.

I am not unbroken at all.  
In fact, I am cracking

I am cracking up right now.

Split the seam of this sentence  
And it is unsensible  
Illegible  
Irreadable

You are not saying enough.

Maybe you did not have time for that short letter.  
That's ok  
Make it long.

Pull me into the sheets  
Of your book.

Five Poems

No.

I have already read that one  
I have already read this one  
Cover to cover  
And I am lost.

Even this poem seems redundant,  
Like I've been here before  
In this mess

How many volumes are there?  
Am I reading yours right now?  
Right now, I am 12 eggs down  
And how many to go?

Five Poems

*The Fire*

We were greedy with the wood,  
And we hadn't even chopped it.  
We knew  
As we lay the logs in a tiny lean-to over the coals  
That they would end the night half-charred,  
And we would wake to the wet, spoiled mess of them.  
But it was worth it to let the orange of it neon  
And glow in a way that only a fire can  
When it's been burning  
Long enough for secrets to be offered  
Freely as after-dinner mints,  
Clothes to be smoked out,  
And toes to at least remember the flames  
Through the night.

Five Poems

*On the Monument Creek Trail to Your Sister's House*

We flung our limbs to propel us forward,  
Moving without our legs but with ecstatic energy.  
We chased our shadows,  
Stopped to meet them,  
Took a photo,  
Knowing they would never be the same again.

We ate the dry air,  
Welcoming the dirt in it,  
As if it were dust  
Off each other's bodies.  
Communion crawled under the roofs of our mouths,  
Tickling until we rang out laughing,  
Knowing we may never stop.

We traded joy for each other's bones,  
And no one felt like kissing.  
He gave me my mouth to keep.  
We moved past each other,  
Pushing with energy,  
Never hands.

You can keep that,  
He seemed to say.  
He meant my body.  
No one ever gave me a gift like that.

We pass each other back to each other every time.  
We dance fight like capoeira  
Conjuring those shadows like ghosts  
With our laughs  
Witches cackles

Is this freedom or belonging?  
Or better?  
Both at once.

I'll hold your weird in my hand,

Five Poems

Only for prosperity,  
Just in case you lose your copy  
Like a set of keys.  
But you can keep that.  
That's yours.  
All yours,  
For keeps.

Five Poems

*Family Dinner at my House*

At my house I am not the Baby.  
At my house I am Home  
And there is no Baby,  
And so, no one is allowed to cry or burden with expectation or take anyone's choices away from anyone else.  
She says something about me as a child, but the radiator eats it  
With a satisfying chomp.  
It chews.  
I chew.  
I ask,  
What if when we become adults  
We are only children of the world?  
What if we were friends like in a movie or on an after-school television show,  
in which we are cast as mother and daughter though we've lived the same years?  
If not years  
We've lived  
And maybe  
At my house  
There is no counting.  
Put your lip back, I say,  
No one needs to pout for what is past and therefore finished  
Like the roast.  
The roast is done now.  
We will carve it together with two knives or four  
Or else rip it apart with our hands.  
That's it.  
We will smell like beasts to scare away our demons.  
Okay, call them memories.  
Those are the side dishes.  
Devour them.  
Pass the serving spoon.  
Let it not be burdened  
Like the one I once threw at my father's head in anger,  
Anger that I was small and he made the rules,  
He was the rules,  
And I was ruled.  
A saber!  
Let it knight us equally,

Five Poems

Give us new titles:

The Serpent

The Queen

Bumblebee

Duck

It doesn't matter,

But can they all be the same?

When the dinner bell rings

let the afterglow of its din

Be the answer to

Whose child is this?

Let the place cards all have the same name

And still

We all know how

And where

To sit.

Five Poems

*Fog Sea*

I took a boat out on the fog sea to find you,  
but you weren't there,  
And the cloud was soft,  
So I sank

Like a crane through night sky  
Slashing white through the purple  
Slashing through the purple night.

In the morning  
The mist settled in to eat my grief—  
If not a shroud, a ghost  
If not a blanket, an apparition—  
And it almost worked.  
We walked through it to disappear—  
To go where things go when they are gone—  
But in the evening  
After the burn off  
We remained.

The river bathes at night when no one's watching  
Flowing itself anew

And the sky is just beginning,  
Just beginning,  
To love me again.