

Stars

Hair formed at the roots, before I'm given name,
Part of my becoming. Framed pictures line

My family's hallway with memories of mine,
Or those told to me. Passed down,

Passed around, homemade loaves of bread served on
The same wooden slab, supper's stories, home,

Worlds of my own that I let them take part in,
Green blades and chain-linked afternoons.

I'm still getting acquainted, but death is shining
His jet black shoes, creating a tune just

For the day that he'll take me, commissioned
To sneak through my window and save me

From the place I called home. But I know Who allows him to
Roam, so I sleep well, for now, counting

Sheep gathered around Abraham,
Standing between two wide fields,

Looking towards the dark blue skies
Ignited with light, the promised generations,

Future family or the family of the future,
Either way, one of those stars is mine.

Beside clusters, others rise, spark alive,
Shine, and any other synonym that captures the night;

And I smile when I see corners of this world meet
Strangers from dust setting their course to eternity.

There are a multitude of promises I cannot drop,

Because I've never been asked to hold them.

Fold them, stroke my scalp when I forget these are the same follicles of
Hair I had at twenty-two weeks in the womb, floating

In darkness. I still can't sleep, but half-baked analogies
Continue to spoon-feed, so I let them,

Jotting notes and random imagery,
Hoping when I wake, they'll help me

Tell the story that is waiting for me.
Burdens shared by those like Angelou,

Untold tales, placed within me from somewhere
Near Death, will he bring me to my open field,

My meta-narrative, strung with characters,
Greeting me with a light of their own, all shone from

The same source, my true home: One who waits
For me in those ever-expanding rooms on the other side.

Adams, TN

Black forests and abandoned graveyards are hidden

By rippled hills just beyond me, baptized in grey.

Dead trees keep watch under ashy skies

Bound by the ground below them.

A troubled German shepherd barks at

Nothing; the name-tag is faded.

I pass by Benson station and see

Three children running in circles on the track,

One scuffs up gravel with his stick, and two others whistle a

Tune I do not know. Their jungle was once my safe place,

Faking danger, I wander down the hill

To the only general store we will ever have.

Must I bring these buildings back my childhood?

Do they not ache of home?

“Drink up”, my mother would say to me,

And I’d tip the milk jug back till the rim scraped

My polluted nose, until the thrill of having it to myself was

Drained and I would go out back by myself. Alienated

Cartons and dormant totes rest against a folded refrigerator box.

Cracked pavement swallows me where I stand,

And I realize the town that once knew my dreams

Can no longer look me in the eyes.

My Father's Father

He'd say, "faithfulness can't be taught," but still tried his best.

He said, "if you're in a fight with your spouse and one of you wins,

You both lose." Service after death, grieving and relief,

When his wife went in the ground, he still gardened.

Mary's fence fell over, and until the last three,

Every few months he would walk over and help her re-anchor the posts in

Soil. He's say, "everybody's getting older," and then he'd laugh about it.

He held my hand on the dust path spread out as my inheritance,

Where I dropped my turkey sandwich and he gave me his.

Much left to give, paintings hung on either side,

Reminding him that fears can be explained.

Thinning, hair tossed to the side, aching everywhere,

Unkempt, stained white shirt, and sweat. Unkempt,

A collection of watches stretch across his dresser,

Pacing a reluctant race with one another, all going the same place,

Lapsed, the seconds passed him when he tried again to take that drink.

Spilling, tears were met with unread pages. Broken,

Family watched him choke and gasp on hope.

He knew it well once. He kept saying, "please," and

None of us knew how to answer. A stranger to himself,

Rising for the last time, tasting his own breath.

The Day After Easter or When Our Kids Went Home with Their Kids

Orange fields belongs to the fading sun,

Entitled to a light all its own,

But the cool night is ours,

Trying to find a way to tell us

It's had enough of our gentle coaxing.

Your hair still gets in your eyes.

Rocking on a small porch we paid a little bit extra for,

I sneeze loudly and you assure me

The tight narration of a book I'll never read.

You chuckle softly and rub your hands

Together we crane necks to see something

Just beyond the field. Please fill my mind

With what's on yours, if you could.

Are you missing them already, or are you content?

Yesterday's downpour stopped at our driveway.

I wait for you to look my way again,

As we grow old and embrace it together.

If we're still aging, we still have time.

We could run in the rain again.

Chasing hens out of a barn that wasn't ours.

That old farm was falling apart,

And your father always spoke with firmness:

"You'll get tetanus climbing around like that"

But that night, crumbling as it was,

Will stay forever untouched.

You cast your lips above my pursed brow,

And hand me sweet tea with crushed ice.

I didn't hear you rise this time, so I strain

My ears to hear the sound of your rocking chair

Talking back to the floor boards beneath it.

The damp newspaper still lies at our feet,

And countless calendars rest on our dresser.

Your hands loosely grip mine, forever,

I am held. When the wind whispers to us both,

We'll pretend not to hear it.

Always

I.

I lied and said I wasn't home,

Whispers waft through the boards;

With the soft peel of its walls, this abandoned shed bound to the scene.

Both floating and sinking, it rests in peace as the ground and the sky

Gently meet. Ever-aging oaks slowly shake free the bent snow that

Drifts from the blackened bark. Light footprints, careless red squirrels

Dance across the dusting, yet a groaning ground remains

Deep below this thin layer of a February pattern.

II.

I rise, resting stones in a stack. The smooth surface mirrors

Stirs beneath my feet as I begin to move again,

Through the passing of wet grass. Atmosphere ripples to the

Sounds. Creatures rise to their own tone, today's melody

Weaves around dogwood, honored,

As I am, to witness the return of a familiar light.

Sun stretched forward, extending rays into limbs

Of strengthened trees. I pass through an untouched morning.

III.

Trying to sleep, or finally waking up, again I've stepped outside
To smell a world so painfully beyond me. Clouded winter skies
That have died, and autumn fields long faded,
With fallen colors that will be re-birthed.

Felt ocean grains scrape against their home
Never able to grate the depths of an ever widening sea.
These reflections will always outlive the poet
As part of a history I cannot contain, but to be,
And to be a part of it, if only for a time,
Is a gift that we can only call life itself. And on nights
Like this one, by the lake behind my house, when the moon is completely
Absorbed, it seems I'm just passing through after all.