

## A Child's Blood Bargain

They never told me  
How my bones would crack apart,  
How my throat would tear in half,

All so I could come out *better*.

They never told me  
That, in order to be born anew,  
I'd have to die.

They *tricked* me!

I thought it was a sacrifice  
I was willing to make. If I just broke enough  
I'd become what I wanted.

All I wanted was to be everything.

They never told me  
I would wake with the ache  
Of all their failed attempts

As the only thing holding me  
together.

## My Brother's Sword

My brother had a wooden sword  
And with it, he was fighting fit.  
He said he would conquer the world  
And I could help him rule it.

But as we aged and changed backyards  
Our games became like real life,  
And when pretending got too hard  
We grew taller just to pass time.

When we had to switch our clothes  
To the blacks and whites of business,  
I thought he would still be my brother,  
But his sword hand held a briefcase.

And in the time we used to play—  
Fighting wars in made-up places—  
He let his face turn marble grey,  
The sort of boring we'd once hated.

So as the old look on the new,  
I face my playmate with disgust.  
With his wood sword i run him through,  
To prick the childhood in his gut.

## Obsession and the Common Man

It is a beast crouching on his chest,  
Claws clenched 'round the rungs of his ribcage.

He pries its talons from his heart and lungs—  
Tries to rip himself free of this burden—

But he finds the wound stings more  
With nothing to stopper the bleeding.

His breath wheezes out, his blood pools,  
And he's struck by an urge to guide the claws back in.

## My Ancestors Squat In My Stomach

They bang on my ribs with sticks,  
Rhythmically spelling out a song  
Called tradition.

My grandfather burns holes in my lungs  
With all the cigarettes he smoked  
Fifteen years before I was born.

He held me once in his living room  
Before he flatlined.

The memories my great aunt  
Is losing to her own mind  
Float around my head,

And yet I can't stop her from forgetting  
Who I am sometimes.

My uncle is drinking himself to death  
Just how he knew he would.  
He pretends not to care,

But he's terrified when his liver collapses.  
Mine goes with it.

They call out from my stomach,

“Keep us alive inside you!”

*My present is your future*

“Hold our memory close!”

*And my past was once your present,*

“We will always be within you!”

*But my past is not my future.*

I form my firm reply:

“You’ve taken root in my family tree,  
Tangled yourselves in my heritage,  
But you are not in *my* blood or *my* bones.

The mistakes you made in your lifetimes  
Will not hang over mine.”

My ancestors squat in my stomach  
So I will let it collapse around them.

I will cough them out with broken lungs,  
Forget them with a cracking memory,  
And pull myself from this drunken stupor.

I cannot hold tight to their tragedies  
Without becoming one myself.

## Last Will and Testament

Please don't confine me to a tomb.

Lay me down by a slow-moving stream and let me  
Decay until I am part of something greater,

Until rainwater courses through my veins  
And my skull mosses over,

Until my heart crystalizes  
And my bones turn to wood.

Let some traveller use me to light a fire.  
Let my ribs protect him from the cold,  
If only for the night.