

IRISES

I hope that you have irises,
but only in the best way.

I pray that you aren't
the Van Gogh of your story,
painting flowers to make it through
a series of painful days,
only to end them soon.

I want a life for you
that doesn't need the work of your hands
to make worthy the space your bones occupy.

I would wish for you
a garden plot with bulbs you cradle and settle,
to hereafter enjoy them each year,
without renewing your strain.

I desire a dream for you
interjected with purple and yellow,
pleasant and lovely,
instead of a haze in which you dutifully wait
for buds to pull you out.

I never want you to need
perennials to be the things
that keep your heart warm and eyes shining.

I ask for you a life of irises
that you can enjoy
fully, deeply, truly,
without ever feeling the need to paint them.

I hope you say to them,
"beauties, I don't know
which of us will last longer

but to the victor the spoils,
and the loser the same,

since we are both beautiful
in our times."

DOLLHOUSE

I don't know why I've been thinking of you.

If I could, I'd carefully
remove my head from my neck
and cleanly open it on its hinges,

so I could see for myself
the doll's house you've made,
and wonder how someone could look so at home.

You're in the kitchen, bright and white,
with the tea I never touch
and the cereal I forgot about.

We're cooking side by side
and drinking short glasses of aloe water.
And we could really work.

Your face is in the bathroom mirror,
and I'd be beside you, if it weren't so intimate.
Not now, not yet.

You love the living room couch
that we laid on like puzzle pieces,
when not played out on the floor like children.

The list of movies we'll watch there
is in your back pocket,
living safely inside your wallet imprint.

You've glanced into my bedroom,
and I wish I could have made you stay
for longer than the second you spent.

I never said it to you,
but my favorite idea
was us waking up to each other.

We're on the back porch,
crouched down with my dog;
I'm the gentle one, and you're playful.

"She's much nicer than I am,"
he says to her.
"Just a really good person."

You're at the kitchen table,
and I'm asking about your weekend—
and how much are you not telling me?

When you come over, like always,
you see me put my papers away
and still never ask what I'm writing.

Your favorite place is the creek out back.
I take my shoes off to follow after,
because I would go anywhere with you.

And you know I loved you everywhere,
but most of all there,
with water sounds and sidelong glances.

But it's been long enough
that I'm surprised
when I find you visiting my doll's house.

So I blink away the things you left;
shopping lists and scribbled letters,
fingerprints from my favorite hands.

I'm not upset with you for being here,
as much as myself
for leaving the door open

And I ask you, long-lost friend,
"Of all the places you could be,
why would you choose here?"

I'll usher you away,
push with the back of my hand
and blow out the dust you left.

Because you don't live here anymore.

WHERE I LIVE

I've had many homes—
so many that I count them
on my fingers and toes.

Ones with tangerine-printed carpets,
mantels with no fireplace,
and cacti that looked like velvet.

Walls painted like a princess's castle,
the hum of highways out back,
and so many webs that we named one home "Spider House."

Where I live now has all I need:
tall, bright windows
and a white, down comforter.

But there's still a home I think about,
that I haven't been to yet:

one with a man who loves me
and a toddler with hair like mine.

Tomato gardens and clotheslines,
inky black nights—
living your days sprawled out.

I don't know when,
and I don't care where.

Until then, I live here.

CRY, DADDY

I'm afraid that I'll forget about you.
Afraid that the words I scribbled on your funeral pyre
weren't the last ones I needed you to hear
before I let you sail away.

If I could say it all over, it would be this:
There are things I need to know from you,
the way I need to know what I'll eat today.

Like for all the tears I have for you,
how many would you have for me, now?

I last saw you two years ago,
and that's a lifetime;

saw your face before we put you in the ground,
but that wasn't you.
Like some bizarre science fiction.

I made sure never to touch your skin,
because they said you felt like stone
and my daddy was a furnace.

Please cry for me, Daddy,
though I hope I never made you that sad

I've realized just how the same we are.

You always said I was like my mom—
"A day without Cindy is like a day without sunshine."

But a day without Scott is like a day without the wind:
everything just stands still.

Daddy, I want to be just like you.
I would be any number of things,
if it brought me closer to you.

There are things I've lost slowly
like your texts and burnt cinnamon toast,
and I want to hear you sing again.

But with the ashes and dust that've slipped
through my fingers, some things stay sifted out
and I can only thank God for that.

Like a notebook you never wrote in
besides, "Scott, 1981"
and to be like you, I'll never write in it, either.

Daddy, I'm sorry.
I didn't do as much as I should have,
and what can I do about that now?

I always carry it around with me
that I should never let someone talk down to me
because you never did.

You thought I was the best thing,
and I need you to tell me now,
because I haven't believed that story
since the day you stopped telling it.

Mom said, a long time ago,
"When you lose someone, it's not just them;
you lose who you were when you were together."

And I lost so much of me with you.

In exchange, I get your pieces
like every time I sob over Jesus,
or laugh too loud.
That's you, all day long.

Cry for me,
so I know I'm doing this right.
So I can let myself be proud.
So I can remember what you sound like.

Give my regards, Daddy,
or Father, tell him for me.
Pass it on and let him know
that every word is true.

Every person I lead,
thing I make, tear I mend;
it's for you.

Please cry for me, Daddy.

BODY

I can't claim expertise on self-love,
since I'm hardly an expert
on myself.

But loving my body
has been a project of study;
a labor of love like an iSpy book.

So, as I see them, I'm thankful for my pieces:

for the dark purple bags under my eyes,
that only sink deeper after I've cried;

for arms that carry and cradle;
legs that run and rest
and let me move like a herding dog;

my fingernails on childlike hands,
that have never forgotten what they've learned.

For my mother's hair, hips,
and head thrown back in laughter;

for my father's feet, nose, and teeth,
and the playful apology he gave for them.

Thankful for my eyes, color-mixed
between his citrine-sage
and her aquamarine;

thankful that, to see them,
you have to look past the sty on my eyelid
that says I was ten years old once.

Everything in me tells
where I came from and who I will be,

and in a clear voice reminds me,
that my body is more than beauty.