

Sixfold Poetry
Submission

Undoing

*To burn like cedar
I request another dream
I need a forest fire
~James Blake*

in the forge, i see mama pulling bada out of the flames. smoke folding into itself. bada's irises now an extinguishable forest, noncombustible. tears evaporate from my curling lips, head unrests from mama's chest. my body, once rubble, does not collapse. the limo driver masters rolling in reverse back to the only two-lotted gingerbread house in chatham. the sun sets in the east. it is not mourning. eyes remain shut. dwelling in the undecided but my bones knew.

that poem should've started with us walking backwards into a funeral home, west on sixty-seventh. the waiting area on the left, the main office - right. our mouths unauthorizing this contract, suppressing all calls for second opinions, reneging the invitation to this internment, or service, or whatever the fuck we were being offered. we insist on another option to say goodbye where my twenty-two-year-old self does not witness bada's body burning in chamber. never inhaling death at two thousand degrees fahrenheit.

my bones knew and in this poem, i settle for a phoenix existing inside blue blown glass around my neck. the bits that got pummeled into dust. an eighty-seven-year old ribbon, grounded, i never saw incinerated. this would be the only memory i'd wear now.

Paralyzed

When walking, we needed three things: the silver walker, the worn black wheelchair, and the will to be mobile. Only eight or nine but I was willing to catch her if she fell. I was strong enough to walk behind as she glided her weighted left leg across the mustard yellow floor. Her muscles wouldn't cooperate the way she wanted them to. Told the doctors to go to hell.

She lifted her left foot off the floor and slowly travel down her 5530 South Shore Drive Apt 12C hallway. It sounds like an easy task but the stroke took this privilege. Left her droopy and immobile and reverted to infant. Seventy-three years old, learning how to walk again.

They say doctors make the worst patients. We should add nurses to that list too.

Keloid

I got my ears pierced
for the first time at eighteen. Sat in a chair
and allowed this stranger to bore holes in me,
willingly. Replaced the gaps with diamonds.
I was handed instructions for cleaning:
take a cotton swab twice a day, dip it in alcohol,
swirl it around the site. Twist often.

Terrified of Bada's warnings,
I cleaned it. Made sure the skin
around the stud didn't hold it hostage.
Form forgotten memories. Become infected.
Hold an extra boulder where beauty
used to be. Our secrets, mostly keloids,
are from her. I dodged the majority of the knives
that carved my legs. Caught all of the words.

I tell myself she didn't mean it.
I still bled. I healed. Still left a narrative behind.

Elegy for Breath

The only time a party erupted in my house
a balloon was born.

Bada's voice crackled. Her smile,
slightly slanted to the left, teeth coated in
Marlboros and Folders. Her breath mostly ether.
The clots stole the parts of her voice
that reminded us of Walgreen after bath splash.

But this day, a kaleidoscope of balloons
were blown. Tied with fingers not quite
old enough to stay up past ten. The colors
glided across the room cloaking
the brawl the walls carried.

She would swat at the balloons with her right hand,
just like she did us after the paralyzation.
She rumbled from laughter.
This day, the roof of her mouth swallowed
every *fuck you* from the ceiling. Her breath
anesthetic.

We giggled away gravity.

How I Named Her

I have known
babies' tongues
to swallow english
and giggle.

The sounds
adults' mouths
have forgotten
were prescription.

My teeth,
barely breaking
through gums
dusted in formula,
swung past options
to baptize her.

At two,
my mouth
too infant,
crusted in apple sauce
pressed its lips
into drums.
I was too rebel
to carve *Grandma*
into the roof with tongue.

My native dialect,
coated in plantains,
exchanged Bibi for Bada.
Kiswahili for a new code.