

### **From the Fountain of Youth**

I retrieved a mason jar full of its essence  
and tucked it away in a far corner of my childhood bedroom -  
perhaps an older version of myself will find use in it,  
this gift bequeathed by celestial beings -  
my name is Innocence,  
and there's a liar sleeping in my bed,  
making a home in the body I call my own -  
correction, this form, piteous and sired by a  
clot of blood and scored clay, is simply a vessel  
for my soul to strain its arms and suffocate -  
my mother ties my hair,  
prayer pressed against the crown of my head  
to defend against the jinn  
lurking in my room -  
hide it, lock it away somewhere,  
this glass bomb pumping blood and feasting on my body -  
parasitism, I learn, is common in nature -  
I see it in my stomach, rotten and undying, while  
I wither -  
there's this wretched noise coming from  
the corner, noises fit for a hummingbird with a  
punctured throat -  
I came to my mother crying one evening –  
*mommy, mommy, someone stole my jar!*

### **Fetus-in-Fetu**

I spent my life eating away at an eight-year gap and  
stuffing my mouth with your ambitions and  
realizations, warping my soul into something new,  
something wicked rotting in the corner of the room.  
Your advice, your struggles, and your happiness  
filled the sea, and I, your follower, sunk in its  
depths. The chlorine no longer stings the back of my throat,  
and I can feel my stomach fall apart under the absence of leptin.  
Who cursed us younger children with the need for mimicry, I ask.  
I stood in your shoes, those five-inch heels,  
and nearly broke my ankles.  
My friends tell me I have the oldest eyes in the room,  
and I can't help but laugh—is it the tilt in my voice as I speak,  
the 'wiser than thou tone' that ties the noose?  
I cut butter with the wit I gathered from your tongue,  
sharpened with your experiences.  
I stopped trying to look for a boyfriend  
once I heard about the man who nearly tore you to shreds.  
I found peace in the written word like you once did,  
cooped up under artificial light and swarming moths.  
They tell me age is just a number,  
a fabrication of the mind—I call it a disease,  
a sister in my stomach who croaks for more.

### **The Talkative One**

I ate a handful of birds as a child,  
the blues and grays of their feathers  
disappearing between my pinked  
lips and into my guts.

They chirp in my stomach,  
talons piercing the soft lining  
while their noises spill  
from my mouth like a broken record.

The birds screech loudly, repeated  
phrases and chants breaking off  
from my mouth until someone  
screams for them to stop.

But what am I to do? I've been sent as a  
translator, one who conveys their language  
to the rest of the world with my slippery tongue  
and incessant poppycock—  
our words are one, slotting and crisscrossing  
like the nests they made for their children,  
a family of ghosts.