

A Prayer

scared. dark.

bodies with voices, but I don't know what they're saying,

lungs forgetting how to breathe.

lay my head in your lap, reading Plath,

exhaling with the iambs.

breathe In. breath out.

try to slow my heart beat to match yours,

but i can't find it

mine, not yours. yours is always there,

the only pulse in my ears

when i submerge my head under the bath,

holding my breath

i try to clench my arms around my ribcage

but it disintegrates under the torch touch of my fingers.

rack of bones morphs into pile of ashes.

all that remains are swollen eyes

the color of creamed coffee

for people to look at, but not into

and ask "how do you do?"

and lips tinged with blood

to smile and answer "just fine."

dear god, how long must I wait in this prison?

how many times will my teeth swallow my tongue

when words try to escape?

how many sacraments must I pay

before my body stops devouring itself?

I clutch my sanity to my chest

like a prized pendant,

i have to guard from the thieves
who creep into my mind at night.
dear god, what am i to do?
dear god. dear god.

Ghosts

I know what it is like to feel small.
Sometimes, I would make myself
tiny enough to fit between the cracks of the paneling
and hold my breath, so those nights
when your blood was more Hennessey than human,
your clenched fists and gnarled teeth would find
something else to bite into.
But sometimes I wanted to be big.
I worked all day drawing you a picture
with my new 64 pack Crayola.
I used colors like "Raw Sienna" and "Tumbleweed."
I drew you the way you looked on the good days,
when you laughed and let me run my fingers through your beard.
I ran to you with my picture, waving it like a white flag.
You ruffled my hair and took my drawing, using it as a coaster
for your collection of bottles, and without even trying
my ribs folded on top of each other,
and I shrunk back into the paneling, under the floorboards,
in the empty spaces between the walls,
a ghost in my own home.

Woman, Defined

What is a woman

but with skin soft as silk,

hiding razor edges that cut you

if you stand too close.

What is a woman

if not bodies that refuse to be branded

and tongues that spit in the faces

of the men who pin them down.

What is a woman

without voices that wail and gnash

when the darkness tries to silence them,

and the knowledge that when she screams in the night,

she never screams alone.