

## Ode to Each of You

You are fragile and unformed  
And I love this about you

You come in and loudly announce the things you love  
The things you hate  
You proudly put your apathy on display,  
As if it deserves its own vast and ornate wing in a museum

Your proclamations of love, of hate, of indifference, I know are in answer to all the  
quiet conversations swirling inside you  
(I wonder if you know this too  
Or if this is a secret I'm keeping for you, a secret I'm keeping *from* you... )

These are the conversations you don't know how to begin outside of your heart.  
These are the conversations you don't know how to begin outside of your head.  
These are the conversations you haven't yet figured out are between and amongst  
your head and your heart and your spirit;  
a spirit which you are still working to know,  
discovery is truly, most definitely, absolutely, never-ending --

You have not yet learned that your head and heart are not meant to be separate,  
not meant to be two poles anchoring a continuum,  
but rather two vital stakeholders that you need to, that you *must* learn how to convene  
continually and confidently.

I know these are the conversations you have at night when you can't sleep  
So instead you roll over, bathed in blue screen light and scroll, endlessly,  
Until all those quiet, constant, varied, conversations are merely soft murmurs in a  
Moonless, star-filled sky.

You are learning that it is simultaneously getting so much easier and so much more difficult to  
hide from yourself.

You are fragile and unformed  
And I have never wanted to cover you in glass or build a fence around your parameter.

I have only ever wanted you to feel the sun  
To know the rain, the strong wind on your new self  
For you to watch the worms move past you and not be afraid or preoccupied that they have  
figured something out that you are still working on

You are fragile and unformed  
And I have never wanted this to scare you  
I have only ever wanted you to know that it has never been and will never be about perfection,  
that being delicate is *good*, that not knowing what you will turn into is *great*, that  
Potential energy, that all of your not-yetness is planned and on purpose and meant to be and  
*don't worry*

You are fragile and unformed  
And I love this about you  
And I hope you have learned to love this too

Upset

It feels like drowning,  
Like being swallowed whole,

Or, it feels like wanting to drown,  
Wanting to be swallowed whole  
Craving to be submerged.

Wanting to be consumed--  
By something very big, forceful, weighty

Like needing oceans and avalanches,  
Volcanoes and mudslides,

Like needing thunderstorms.

It's devastation and  
Destruction,

It's waves crashed on rocks,  
Shipwrecks; no lighthouse in sight--

Something loud; something uncontrollable  
It's dramatic and tragic and even cinematic--

But, it is actually stillness and silence  
No movement. Can't actually move. Don't want to move.

Motionless on soft pillows  
The faintest, barely there sound of salty tears,  
Dropping from the side of my face  
Onto the cotton nearby  
As a candle flickers and embers die.

## Evidence

I have this memory  
It is of your heart beat  
It is of your heart beating so fast  
Under my ear  
As I lay on your chest, drowsy and half awake

In the fog of sleepiness  
I thought -- nerves?  
I thought -- excitement?  
I thought -- maybe both?

To this day, it is the only evidence I have  
That there was ever a single moment, a chance  
Or possibility  
That you might have wanted me

Early July -- Green River, Williamstown, MA

I can feel the small stones under my feet  
It is what I am desperately trying to focus all my attention on,  
Focus all my attention on, as I will myself not to cry.

We are here at the Green River  
The children run naked in and out of the cold water,  
They delight in the smallest splash,  
In the drop of a stone,  
In the cool wetness on this hot and humid day

All their parents watch on  
(as do I)  
They chat about people they know having babies  
Getting settled and enjoying this stage of life that is filled with the chaos of runny noses,  
Lost shoes and endless questions that they admit are both profound and tiresome.

But I feel like a monster  
Because I can't enjoy this beautiful scene

Instead my insides churn with sour longing,  
With sadness  
With a grief for what has never been  
And a panic and fear it never will

I become acutely aware of being uncharacteristically quiet  
I find I can't seem to speak for two reasons:

The first is I'm afraid that if I try to speak I will cry  
I will give myself away  
(I worry I already have)  
(And now I really have, here, in this poem)

The second is I have nothing to contribute to this conversation  
Absolutely nothing  
And the nothing I have feels so, so loud.

I can't rejoice or commiserate in having small children  
To share the minutiae of my life seems all together pathetic

It is not interesting to share anything about the groceries I buy  
Where I drop my laundry  
Because yes, I live in a small one bedroom apartment,  
And no, there is no in-building washer-dryer

I focus on the stones under my feet  
The heat in the air  
And the sound of laughter and splashes  
As I feel all the longing in my bones,  
My heart caught in my throat.

All I think as I try not to cry is how desperate I am  
for all the ordinary blessings everyone seems to have acquired  
that continue to elude me year after year after year

Hudson, NY

I walk in the opposite direction than I did this morning  
I do my best to walk with purpose and curiosity

I imagine that I'm not from  
This country  
I imagine that all I see I have no claim to

I remember what it was like to walk the streets of Oslo and of Stockholm nearly a year ago  
I remember how free it felt to think,  
    "This is all new";  
    "I'm not from here";  
    "none of this is mine and never will be"

Being in a new place in one's country of origin is deceptively difficult—  
The rules are different— at once out of place — at once speaking in native tongues but without  
ease or comfort  
All I keep thinking is  
"I'm not from here"

The familiar and the distinctive collide and overwhelm  
So I do my best to walk with purpose and curiosity