

## BEDTIME STORIES

I.

I imagine my father  
carrying boxes upstairs  
in his too-skinny arms  
and my mother, suitably  
impressed. I don't ask  
for details, just the dog  
he gave her for Valentine's Day.  
My mother wouldn't give it up but she told me  
about the breakup long enough  
for her to love a man who was not  
my father. It didn't change the ending  
I know by heart: gazebo, dress,  
wedding.

II.

I can't sanitize my stories for child  
consumption, can't have the stuffed  
Valentine's dog without the sex.  
There was no true love in my dorm room  
but on my twin bed Nicole found my G-spot,  
loudly. In our future, I wanted  
rings and flowers but my story is more  
the original Grimm, wolves  
under covers and blood in my shoes.

## AT THE AA MEETING

You won't believe I love you until I walk  
from Thomas Circle down to Dupont;  
up carpeted stairs, past walls  
flagged with inspiration and lists of hours;  
I enter close on your heels,  
take a back-corner seat,  
surrounded by girls who share the same secret  
again and again and never,  
never guess my secret,  
that I don't belong.

Every other word I write is a confession.  
But here I can't keep pace,  
my tongue can't form the words  
"Hi Jessica" so fast.  
I offer no memories here;  
no blackouts or mommy issues.  
I don't repent, I don't believe, I don't  
even like the feel of booze. I like the taste  
of you. After prayers you show me  
to your friends, buy me honey in a box.

CLYTEMNESTRA AFTER THE MURDER  
*John Collier, 1882*

I will never be a constellation. At night  
I trace the stars into gods, heroes, men  
who take—and women, victims all. I brush  
Gemini, thumb caressing the brothers  
who never once looked back.  
I blot out Cygnus. I have no stomach  
for swans. But I can stomach more  
than these female forms reduced  
to pinpoints, maidens dead for love,  
daughters sacrificed—Andromeda,  
Ariadne, Helle, Semele, Cassiopeia—  
I will outshine every one. I am a woman  
who takes back. There is bloody cloth  
in the closet, a lover in the bed.  
Better a murderess than a star.

ON THE FIRST MORNING AFTER HE MARRIES ANOTHER

“I languish for you... my sentiments for you are those of a woman.”  
- Hans Christian Andersen to Edvard Collin

Lie to me—  
I have learned to love untruths  
when they're all I have.  
I learn to call them stories.  
I write you in the margins:  
prince and scoundrel.  
Let me be the bride.  
I dream of metamorphosis,  
a shape to fit to yours,  
legs to part and curves that give  
beneath your hands—  
soft as seafoam,  
harsh as nettles.  
Give me your ring,  
be selfless just this once.  
At sunrise, cut my fingers  
at the knuckle,  
take my tongue,  
marry your girl in silence,  
safety. Cut between my legs,  
let me bleed out  
red as this morning.  
Remember this is nothing,  
this is fiction, fantasy.  
Remember that I'm lying.  
Close the book.  
Begin again.

## WANDERER

I leave doors unlocked tonight  
wanderer I open windows  
wind in my curtains making  
nightmare shapes I put on  
the good sheets I put on  
my best nightgown I brush out  
my hair I lie down wanderer  
I don't sleep I don't hide  
don't bunker myself tonight  
to ward away bad men  
because you wanderer are not  
man what you are I can't say  
pixie or spirit nymph or maybe  
just girl all I know wanderer  
are your words your letters  
your promises in the creases  
for me your word wanderer  
is enough come into my room  
into me stay I left wine  
on the sill mint on the pillow