

Nana

A gift from Nana as a kid.

Clay chunk owl and a cut of kitchen twine,
two eyes and a triangle beak, a stub tail slit to make
a whistle to make a small sweet lonesome hoot.
A simple one-sided slide knot for adjusting
length. I try it on in the bathroom.

Nana's bathroom:
two toilet papers – Grandpa's over
and Nana's under – the small shelf lined with porcelain birds,
a vigilant cross-stitched buteo, the handmade sign
demanding regard for the septic.

There's a great-horned in the old corn silo
out back (yellow-capped), a one-winged hawk named Bandit
and his pink-eyed ghost brother. A kestrel posted by the porch
door, suspicious whenever I pass, plates and flatware,
summer family dinner.

Blind screech owls in the basement
meet our finger pokes with out-puffed plumage
and shivering squeals; their bites are gentle. All
the birds are hushed, unblinking.
All are readapting.

One time

Grandpa opened
the red-tail flight cage
even though he wasn't
supposed to. Nana
wasn't home.

He stood outside
while I stepped in and stayed
still. The bird on her dead limb perch
eyed me. A split moment pause.
She unfolds into full-winged flight.

Eyes wide gold glaze,
her face so near the widths
between our pupils seem equal. Paired.
Time breaks. She hangs temporarily while
I wonder what comes next.

Mixed murmurs of both relief and Grandpa's realization that he's now in trouble (again, like when he thought I was ready for barstools – age 2 – or piloting – age 5 – or motorcycles – age 6 – slowly only because by then we'd already proven ourselves untrustworthy).

I grew up taught humans and animals were incapable of an empathetic understanding, biological divisions and misinterpretations and the misguided desire to anthropomorphize.

Instinct v. Intellect.

I grew up taught fish lacked souls and

we might likewise.

Life is mechanical, chemical, stimuli
and response,
unfeeling.

But her claws hold my shoulder amiably,
asking only, why
did you not bring food?

She must have mistaken you for her, he says.
Taller now, blue-eyed, blonde and
structured just like Nana.

Heavenish

This is when I was wearing mink and I spilled my drink on your dress

This is when we left the ice out and it melted on the kitchen floor

This is when we walked 12 blocks to 711 because it's better than Citgo
and that boy on the balcony shouted down to come up
it was his birthday

This is when we got fries but then we forgot to pay

This is when I forgot how to open doors
When I forgot to close doors
When we slept with the back door open to the street
When you slept in the hall downstairs

This is when you fell down the stairs (second time) and your face hit the concrete
scrapes and bruises in the morning

This is you with your skirt up when you fell down that hill we ran down and you landed on your elbow on
the pavement in the parking lot and we got cold waiting for a ride on a bench and you fell asleep so I held
your face in my hands and cradled your ears and kissed your forehead and cheeks and told you you were
ok

(you told me later you'd been pretending)

This is when I took off your shoes to put you to bed
and the act completely broke you all tears and
a tear in your shirt sleeve somehow sobbing
I tucked your hair back

Sometimes I wish I was taller so I could kiss more people on the forehead

Heaven =

mixed drinks in pint glasses and all the pizza is free
and the bars do carryout in big foam cups
and people give you cigarettes they love you for asking
and the boys are always nice
someone's behind you with their hands on your stomach and you're skinny

You think you love him and saying it makes him cry

This is when no one remembers
But there we all are and we
look so dumb and happy

8/27 – 8/28

A helicopter follows our car.
A man stopped on the shoulder, waiting.
A fire truck broken down.

The Sims kid died in a chainsaw accident.
And this town solved its own murder.
My dad as a child considers his death.

Wyoming is beautiful.

The Mexicana's sign has a hand-painted dove.
Cheyenne is fly-ridden, and the Wrangler store
is haunted. The woman thanks me for my name.

Ogallala is the Cowboy Capital. And between
there and Sidney, on Tuesday, we pass
under a bridge tagged "GRACE."

An elk in the lot. An endless sky.

**The Lady
&
The Gentleman**

24.

A lady with a wine cup
Mughal Style,
late seventeenth century
5 1/8 x 3 inches

The lady holds a basket against her hip with her left hand; a wine cup is implausibly perched on her right hand. Chartreuse ground.

32.

Rāginī Rāmakarī
Mughal Style,
early eighteenth century
7 1/4 x 4 1/4 inches

A lady, seated on a bed, draws away from her lover who falls at her feet. A room with gray walls and a bright orange curtain in the background.

126.

A European gentleman
Kotah,
mid-nineteenth century
3 1/2 x 2 1/8 inches

The redheaded gentleman in white trousers, red coat, and black hat sits on a chair with foliate legs. He holds a cane and sniffs a flower. The bright clouds in the sky are lined with gold. ¹

1. The lady holds the boy against her hip
with her left hand.

A wine cup is implausibly perched
in her right hand.

Wood floors.

*the glass was cold
was it winter?
you're beautiful
in the evening
in the gloam then later
dark the dim and low soft
come and go of this old smoke-
fogged home you're lovely*

2. The gentleman in white trousers
sits on the couch.
He holds a beer. He smiles.
The lady slides into his lap.

She'll forget
and remember only
that his porch door squeaks
and will not close behind her.

*lonely made
left lone set free
deliquescent / humid feelings
in the summertime*

3. A room with gray walls and a bright orange light.
The duvet is striped.
It's winter.

A lady, seated on a bed,
draws away from her lover,
who falls at her feet.

She cries when she's drunk or happy or sad or frightened or feeling thankful.

In the summer when he's gone,
from a place where it's winter,
the gentleman will send the lady
photographs of flowers.

In the background,
in the sky,
the bright clouds
are lined with gold.

From the Train

I watch a doe run tail up to the woods
thirty-two turkeys in a cornfield
a hawk

the corn is dead stalks standing maybe
one or maybe two feet high
lines in rows in snow

tallies

two buck pelts stretched over a fence
nose to nose eskimo kisses smoke
lifting from the chimney
it's a small ranch style home

before I leave dad tells me about antelope
he saw out west stuck in fences
dead because they didn't know
the things made to keep us from running

ⁱ Wisconsin University Elvehjem Art Center. *Indian Miniature Painting: The Collection of Earnest C. and Jane Werner Watson*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971.