

## DOGWOOD

There are dogwoods just past my porch,  
growing out of a steep slope of lemon-lime ivy  
that I can't put my weight on.

The greenery is bright and sickly  
next to the chiffon sky,  
tinted by the layer of pollen  
on the trees and the windows and my eyes.

There are a dozen birds chanting their song and response—  
shrill-calling crows, machine gun mockingbirds,  
and others I can't place, since my dad can't tell me.

They sound light and round and altogether innocent.  
I bet they're signaling— trying to find each other  
now that the downpour's over.  
I bet I could find out.

There are flowers on my windowsill from a man: mine.  
Special occasion carnations in fuchsia & peach & buttercream.  
It was his first time finding them for me.  
I want to dry them, so I won't forget.

I want to tell him in a way he'll know: he did perfectly.  
He's been acting off-balance.  
I hope he'll even out okay.  
I want to tell him more about these flowers and this poem;  
how I don't know anything, but I'm still here.

There's a coffee cup I've let take up lodging on my desk.  
An ecosystem of its own, now just a mug made of mold.  
I want to see how long it can go without effort.  
How long can I?  
I hope I even out okay.

The dogwoods are still there.  
I expected them to hear me talking and move away.  
I don't think the dry well, their flowers.  
They're best as an alive thing.  
Christ is risen and so are the blooms.

I can't reach the branches that say he holds me;  
the crimson-pierced petals that show how he bled.  
How many hand-lengths until I understand it?

Move towards me, please. Please, everything.  
You're just out of reach.

## PLAIN

In this place  
where the grass travels on

and clovers freckle wide fields  
in waves of white pockmarks,

I understand how this could be  
someone's safe place.

In the flat expanse,  
with nothing to break its course,

the omnipotent Wind  
is like an almighty.

Overseeing the plots and acres,  
stretching over earth like canvas,

is the Sky, like a goddess:  
looming and wide and watchful.

So then, I could see  
in a land of crops rustling

and the horizon wide open,  
how this could be a home.

But as for myself,  
it's all I can do

to not wait for the gale  
to break me in half;

or the bottom of the grey clouds  
to fall out and crush me.

I don't belong here,  
and it shows.

Because the thing  
about seeing for miles

is that there's nowhere to hide.

## LITTLE MAN

Little man  
try as he might  
can't stand upright  
as he'd like to

Little man  
says he's a boy  
age disagreeing  
but mind saying the same

Little man  
could be  
any number of things  
if only

Little man  
for all he lacks  
in angled joints  
and splayed hands

Little man  
is still here  
still a radiator  
giving off heat

## MOTHER

There was a point  
when I found it  
near impossible  
to leave my mother's side—  
and would you believe me  
if I told you  
how close that point is?  
But here am I,  
pulled every direction  
except towards her,  
and I'm acclimating.  
I am her, incarnate:  
rubber band woman  
to be pulled and snapped  
every which way.  
But will there ever  
(maybe never)  
be a time to release  
and be with her again?  
Little girl at a sleepover  
calling home at the last minute;  
except the minutes keep getting

later and later,  
and I know this because  
I still haven't called.  
The nights are getting  
farther from me,  
stretching out, very out.  
But right now,  
while I still haven't called,  
I must be at least  
a little okay.

## ECHOS

Interstate 64  
runs perpendicular  
to the back of our property.

I say “our”.  
I’m not a permanent fixture,  
but I haven’t left yet.

I’m back and forth  
enough to still notice  
all the house sounds.

Wooden joints settling  
under snow, and my own  
knees cracking.

Mud daubers frenzying  
in their modular homes  
built in the back door’s frame.

Dogs running on moss,  
pressure washers churning,  
cicadas crippled on the ground.

Sitting on the broken back step,  
the highway two hundred feet back  
carries even older sounds to me.

The pads of toddler feet  
chasing after startled chickens,  
unphased by their fear.

Music video basslines  
reaching out from under  
my brother’s bedroom door.

Steak and eggs sizzling  
in a cast iron skillet,  
as my dad ground coffee by hand.

The windblown whistle  
from between his front teeth:  
its own bluegrass harmony.

Then, the sounds I never heard,  
but only heard about.  
High, hurting things.

Coughing and retching,  
heavy footsteps and shouts,  
stretched cries and first responder voices.

Then, nothing.  
No interstate sounds  
in a moment.

So, I reenter my  
echo chamber home,  
and lay on my creaking bed.

The pulls of the ceiling fan  
are clinking together,  
picking up where the highway left off.

It's speaking for all of it;  
echoing its wishes  
like a dying animal's breaths.

*Clink, clink, clink.*  
*Shhhh.*  
*Stay.*  
*Or at least*  
*remember me.*