

Everything must come to an end.

So Abel said to Cain the day he shipped out,
though the forlorn shape of the man in the field where once his brother's turnips grew
could not level himself with the soil,
did not hear the comforting words from below,
though he might have felt a sudden, implacable sadness (they were twins).

It was weird about Cain and that protective mark, weird and crueler than
anything I'd ever read, because obviously he'd be wishing for death, but in my head
he'd be the type to see the scant leaves on a tree out his window, fall colors already,
and lose his nerve, gun falling to the ground in a clatter, knocking
at the tomb of the one love he'd really had to sample
--they were at it, yes, and Cain always said it was a sin,
but they knew each other like interchangeable road maps stamped
on the backs of each other's hands—
and as crazy as he knows it is he also knows Abel wouldn't want this for him—
torture, yes, screaming, perhaps, but not at anyone's hands but his own.
Not on some strange road to nowhere for the rest of a tired life.
Cain can imagine it now: Abel would call these musings pedantic shit in the same
mocking tone as he talked about 'that God stuff';
the same way he'd said, that day he was laying out his
damn cucumbers, so perfect and green from the rain,

that he would prove him wrong.

creation (the quietest fight)

you know them—
the bottles of pills, the uphill climb,
the way a walk down the driveway in
october can make all the difference (the coldest
of days are when the stories
are born.)

twice along the river in back of the church you thought
about dying; your friends were
inside, you could hear them laughing
(they never knew.)

you walked the trail in the forest, the one
you always knew was for you,
leafy mouth waiting like a love letter,
and on the other side you found another
stream, smaller and uncivilized, and began
to cry.

but the summer would come again and you would throw
away your embarrassing journals—
ashes to ashes—and begin to empty your
mind, terrified—to start at the beginning
(dust to dust.)

I have walked through the rain on campus

up the stairs on the hillside, past the
little sleeping cemetery.
shoes sloshing, shirt slicked
to my back. up I climbed, with the slow
exhilaration of being really wet beyond repair.

I smiled at the people passing with their
umbrellas, knowing that to them I must seem to carry
inside me a secret truth (here I let the rain fall all around me,
here I let it wash me
away).

Narnia

the snow comes down,
soft, outside, all around.

it is nights like this when
I am brought to the place
in me that I no longer thought existed;
that place is cool, but not without
flames. it prescribes my fate:

you, that calm place says,
will lead a lonely, burning life.
sometimes you will be happy,
and when you are, you will think
your happiness is of a brand never
experienced before. you will gaze out
windows and doors at the subtle drifting
snow and think you alone walked
onto the white precipice of this world and
teetered on the frost-limned edge,
crossing into soft forests,
forever white.

alone, because it couldn't be otherwise.
alone, because the hushed voices in the trees
with their hollow throats tell secrets only you can
hear.

I've known it.
I am Lucy in the wardrobe,
playing hide-and-seek in an endless
house with an ancient reek and older
secrets

(but Lucy becomes the queen and never has to
leave.)

lao tzu

two autumns ago
I went through the *tao te ching*,
stretched out on a college bed,
windows open to the loud night,
the cigarette smoke, the cars passing,
occasionally, too fast, burning rubber on
the curves of the asphalt
(the moon was waxing towards full,
baring its indolent face from behind the
shock of barbed branches shooting up
from scattered trees, the sky streaked
with different shades of gray darkening
to blue.)

I had a glass of wine beside me,
the velvet taste molded to my tongue
and I was thinking about life, and
living it—that little book so small and
profound in my hands,
the historic manses on the streets outside ready
to greet me, that moon waxing to full—
or was it waning?
in the half-yellowed glow from my lamp
on the white walls, the dark closing in making it
progressively harder to see,
it hardly seemed to matter.
(to be completely full is to be emptied.
to be emptied is to be—completely—
full.)