

**If only**

## peace

peace demands a turn to speak  
from the back row of  
the largest classroom  
raises a hand in defiance  
glances at confrontation  
steadies for a fight

my mother  
well intentioned told me that peace was  
to sit in silence and wait  
on God's timing  
but did not teach me that I am a  
goddess on my own time  
that peace is seldom quiet and  
operates in urgency  
peace is the sound of feet running  
pavement away from cycles of abuse  
the sound of mothers lighting candles  
in remembrance of dead sons and  
daughters blowing smoke as they  
ready to free the captives  
wings spread

have you ever watched a spider  
spin silk around a moth  
held your breath through a field of  
butterflies in your stomach  
wondered aloud and tear filled at  
the moment of triumph or long  
pause before the  
last supper

peace is the chewing of the meal  
before you swallow and peace  
is the nourishment from the  
meal as you finish and peace is  
the neurons that fire because you  
ate and peace is the energy you  
leave behind

when you pray for a soul you imagine  
its entrance to heaven all song and sunrise

or the fiery flames licking it over all  
defeat but peace is the freedom  
to imagine one thousand other  
outcomes  
creation exists in the inbetweens of  
life and longing and you cannot tell me  
or my mother now that there is no  
peace in a womb or that blood and  
disaster and stars and universes do not  
also inhabit it

watch  
in a hurry before time wipes  
across the slate and cleans to begin again  
peace is the scream of the chalk  
the first word of a toddler the last  
word of a goddess  
one thousand other echoes of freedom hard fought  
and finally won

## **whole**

It took me until I was thirty five to  
love my body enough to listen  
and Believe her when  
she told me "no" with her smallest voice  
in her biggest time  
to let her unfold and fold  
wrinkled and rolled  
sober  
into fits of laughter  
to hold her gently when she  
cried  
to imagine uninhibition

Ravishing  
in the beauty of enough  
large and containing  
multitudes I stopped biting my  
fingernails to the quick  
catching blood drops on my tongue  
while smiling  
I let the skin stretched home of my  
infants breathe all the way in  
until she is full

I met her in the corner at a cocktail party  
and loved her as she filled her plate  
as her eyes danced across hors d'oeuvres  
and decorations and drank  
opulence and dove into  
Abundance  
She is

I told her for the first time that she  
is Beloved  
worthy of stories with twists  
and turns and lovers and victory  
of climax and windows down hair blowing  
tangled and unkempt  
but draped in sunlight and  
celebration  
salt kissed and well traveled I  
told her I loved the dirt on the bottom of

her feet the  
scars inked into her knees the  
way she extends others second chances  
like an offering that  
when I dream I can feel pieces of her heart beating on other continents  
and yet

when I reach across my own body  
caress my navel with my big hands  
smile at laugh lines mirror eyes and  
take up space  
I finally love her loud enough  
and quiet enough  
and for long enough to know that  
she has given and given and she is still  
whole

## dying

I think about dying every day  
so when Eric the yoga instructor encourages us to inhale  
and then exhale and  
then close the back of our throat and  
let ourselves feel empty and let ourselves feel need

I think

\*this\* is how I want to go

mid-breath

needing

laying on my back or stretching to the sky

still

becoming

in silence and contemplation

The act of re-regeneration

or laughing loudly as a lover tells a story

laying side by side

or walking a sunlit path

rays dancing off a chemo bald head

still victorious

I want to die in the act of creation

paintbrush arcing between delighted fingers

half covered canvas

dreams still unseen

I want to die mid poem

words aching at the back of my throat

my obituary will just say

Hello World

isn't it wonderful?

and my held breath will tell the world all the ways she was

## the prize

I sold a bunkbed on Craigslist today and  
when the grandmother came to pick it up  
she told me about how the system had  
taken her grandchildren  
from their parents'  
poverty  
and paid  
another family  
for their care

how she'd fought to regain  
them  
to retain them  
to house them  
and to create safety  
for them in what  
turns out to be a very unsafe world  
especially for bodies that  
are brown or black or dark or big or small or

so I gave away a bunkbed today  
and with it  
a box of Legos a few old shirts  
some Crayola markers  
some kind words and  
not enough

someone asked me if I believed in  
attractiveness privilege  
like  
when things come easy because  
you have been called traditionally beautiful  
girl next door  
all your life  
and I think that I have always been  
on the cusp of "Grab her by the pussy" able  
and I wonder if that has done me better  
or worse  
if that is a prize or

I keep thinking of all of the times I was asked to be quiet  
in a boardroom

and the times when my ideas were repeated  
as if they were a man's own  
and then I think  
at least I got a seat at the table  
in that boardroom  
as a woman  
and then I think  
that's a horribly fucked up way  
to think  
about my right  
and my worth

is that the prize?

as a teenage mother in the foodstamps  
line I never once worried  
that my children would be taken  
away

hear this  
as a teenage mother in the  
poverty line  
I never worried once  
that my children would be taken  
away

there is enough money in my bank account now to  
feed my children  
and line my eyes  
to gift a bunkbed to someone in need

there is not enough money in my bank account to  
speak up in anger  
when my own words  
are repeated back to me

is that the prize?