

Guillotine

I saw my first vagina on top of a hill—in third grade, she was in fourth,
her legs were long like electric poles; she introduced me
to Dr. Pepper and Mr. Goodbar.

Tiny hairs stand upright and this is where it starts.

I fantasize living in a mansion down the street from heaven. Many young years
I woke up lying in lemonade, call it bladder blues.

Now sweat drips down my nape.

My thirtieth birthday I saw a psychic to see if I was
still going to be somebody in spite of all my sins.

I totaled my first car trying to kill a spider.

Once I tried the Atkins Diet to make
the Little League football team, thirty pounds overweight,
and a week and a half to lose it.

I learned how to dance from Mary J. Blige. Here my artery pulsates.

Once I walked to the gas station and bought an armload
of fifty-cent king size Little Debbie oatmeal pies.
Me and my mom ate them all night until our sweet tooth decayed.

I sometimes yank back the shower curtain just to make sure there aren't
any serial killers waiting on me.

Once I rocked fake Jordan shoes—
I was the coolest thing senior year.

My skin meets blade.

I still haven't read *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

For four months, my urine split through my meatus
in two directions, like an old water gun.

I got fired from Quik Trip for saggy pants during my first week of training.

This is not the first time I've died.

Once I overdosed on laxative—blood pressure plummeted,

passed out, coffee table crashed on top of me.

I still overthink eye contact.

For years, I confused my anxiety for a speech impediment and in pre- k, I hit a girl on the bus for not understanding how to tie her shoes, right after I taught her. She said it didn't hurt, just like the truth shouldn't, but it does.

Vulnerability is the act of beheading, for the sake of love, for the sake of beauty. I still have harder deaths to go.

Sediments of Black Blood

I once thought I was a magenta lily
Then a parasite with no afterlife
I was fine being America's vine
Growing through its historical
Negligence with whips then cuffs
Or even its underwater forest
Stuck in a place where I was
half living and half drowning
Then I was antlers tied in a noose
Then tiny fossils that spelt B.L.M.
when reality rushed up under me
And snatched me off my branch

Silence

These boys got me twisted,
how they are sitting here
in my classroom
saying all the things
I wish I could have said
when I was their age:
I don't like sports;
I don't like going to church.

It's like these boys are coaches
of their own destiny,
congregating in the corner,
tongues thicker than oak trees,
spewing out their truth like they
don't care who's watching.

I was, and it made me curl up
to back when I was young
and told to be black
and silent.

Boys play sports
and take their butts to church,
Amen.

I was a curve ball
in a black family
whose tongue was threatened
to be hammered if words
flew out of my mouth,
shimmered with softness,
slid down my forehead
too sweetly.

So I put in my mouthguard
and repented. On Sundays,
I blended in with the pew,
watched scriptures blur
like a yard line on a rainy day.
I learned to shake people up
about God and sports;
shot smooth threes
out of conversations, spoke about
the Lord in generalizations
like the Bible was only a cover.

But these boys
have me all caught up
in their sermon,
choked up like a cleat
shoved down my throat.
Simple boys, but knockouts,
 chests stuck out yet unaware,
so sure of themselves
like they don't know how to
fumble with their feelings.

These boys make me born again,
breaking me out of the boy
into the man I had longed to be.
Like a father, these boys
gave me permission,
permission to offer my tongue
to a world that counted me out,
to a family who tackled me,
to the solid man I could have become
but sprinted from me when I was
told to be black and silent.

May the hammer
never come down on their tongues.
May they never be curled up
and closed. May these boys grow and
grow into the warriors they already are.

I give glory to the lens they live through,
glory to their winning spirit,
glory to their fans who root for them.

I give glory to these boys
for being the beginning of me.

Blank Obituaries

My soul once nudged me to attend fake funerals
that fell out of the sky, sent me to see my sick sibling
at the hospital when I didn't want to work overtime.
So, underneath, I grin hearing that this is your third friend
who has died this year. Tell me, are all your friends
surrounded by a plague or do they choose to dive
underneath life, or perhaps your tongue be too fragile
to grow claws and grip a better lie whenever your heart
calls you to escape a commitment? Underneath, guilt
circulates my body when I hear you come to work
the next day dandy, with no mourning spirit, blood drizzling
from your sky, or memorial date. I'm sure the one who wrote
the book on ethics once was a crook and still revels in lies
from time to time. It seems our excuses go in for the kill,
like slamming a sledgehammer onto our loved ones' head,
as if our tongue is forever a ruptured tentacle
that can't grip onto an excuse that stings less, yet can
slither through the cracks. Perhaps one day our bad habit will
die off, or maybe one day we will lie so hard we'll believe
we are strong enough to live by truth.

rolling in a galaxy of daffodils
more abundant than I could imagine stemming into
a story-teller because of you
who grow seeds not your own but like your own
poems are not enough for you who are the gardener
take these marigolds laid here across this page
take this
as a temple in your backyard this marble courtyard with mosaics of iris
let it be yours snow-white hot springs steaming into
the words *thank you*
a horseback ride to unforgettable
I ask the wind to break its back for you to bear a meadow of children
holding magnolias in your honor
I am a floating fountain
in your landscape