

Start

Lining up near a throng
of other little girls

striped knee socks rising
from velcro sneakers of pink

and purple clashing with camp
shirts orange and white

we waited on dead grass
no longer green until

a whistle broke through
the air, startling our crowd

into motion, and in the middle
of the pack, with whipping

ponytails blinding sight
with elbows and knees

building barriers
locking us like puzzle pieces

keeping the herd together
I found my way out

and flew toward a splintered
makeshift totem pole finish

line upon discovering
that I could run.

Into the West

highway transformations
 criss-cross the country
turnpike entrances
 dot the states
 places recounted
by parkway exits
 co-gen plants
 give way
 to corn fields
to the continental
 divide

there exists a point
 after industry
before complacency
 where scenic overlooks
 become contemplations
 of prairie grasses
the journey
begins at a toll booth

entrance ramps
 gas stations
 rest stops
mile markers
of the passage of time

 interstitial spaces
with roadside sculpture
 and memorial crosses
 replace mini-malls
 and truck depots
where antelope
 really do play
against barbed wire backdrops
 and the unnatural
 beauty
of a smog-inspired
 neon pink sun
melting
 into the horizon

but before I-80
 dead ends
 into the ocean
before you reach the salt flats
 that were once
 vast seas
before tumbleweed
 adheres to the front
 bumper

we
have already passed
into the west

Lauren's Basement

Gray couches loomed
as mountains scattered
across a world unknown,
icebergs always
giving us reason
to fall
to the carpet
sea below.

Spines of couches
became narrow passes
requiring balance,
precision;
always returning
to an arctic crag,
our twin minds
saw those icebergs
everywhere:
India, China, Israel, Mexico...

Too loud,
we were banished
to her bedroom
of plush elephants
and ancient coffee
tins full of exotic coins
 coins that weren't round
 coins that were two colors
 coins with holes in the middle
 coins that didn't feel like metal at all

coins I slipped into my shoe
stolen as a Saturday night
sleepover bled
into Sunday morning
Hebrew school carpool
tumbling down the sidewalk
chiming like bells -
India, China, Israel, Mexico...
she would have given them to me
had I asked.

A reunion memorial
told of her adventures
the first news
I had
in over a decade.
Continents were explored –
This time, for real.
This time, apart.
But icy roads
require balance,
precision
and the carpet sea
was no longer there
to break her fall,
no iceberg cushions
helped navigate
her way home.

To find them now
where wouldn't we go?
India, China, Israel, Mexico...

Desire

I want your lips,
 lips that are mine
neither by birth
 nor commitment,
I want them to kiss places
 with no proper names
 in the annals of anatomy.

We will name them
 together.
We will baptize those places
 with our breath
 the order of consonants and vowels
 secret
 and idiosyncratic
and shared
 in silence.

I want your eyes.
 I want to claim them
 in a way that I cannot.
I want them on me
 following me
 feeling their gaze move and rest
 in time with my hips
and I want to see what I look like
 inside them.

The Last Reading

Words flowed from her mouth,
bees smoothed by honey,
amplifier hum without the feedback.
Harmony and melody,
euphony and dissonance at once.
Audience sitting awed,
the sacred silence of the local library
louder for the tension.

The infinity in a pause,
the time between poem's end
and solemn applause,
carries a broken
memory of the moment.
Confused,
fumbling for a thought,
I waited on her words.

She quoted Roethke instead,
read her poem
on the power of sound
then never read her work again.
Recollection conflates
both verses though.
I remember them all wrong,
the song of the memory
mattering more
than the absolute truth.