

Oedipus

I have not forgotten my vow.

Every morning, I wipe the sweat
from the hollow of my master's throat.

At first, he can only move
his eyes; then, his jaw.

I take his right arm
in my lap

like a mandolin rescued
from a burning cathedral. Imagine

if all the houses
I burned to the ground

were my own. I live
in fear. Not of pain, but of

what I cannot see. He teaches me
what I need to know—

how to touch a woman
on a rollercoaster,

how to pull a ghost from a dress
floating in a river.

I press the muscle in his shoulder
with my thumb

until it softens, move my hands
across his chest. He tells me

that each scar is an eye which,
after seeing too much, has been sealed shut.

I find the pain in his body
as if it is my own—

as if *I* am the one who has seen too much,
as if it is maddeningly clear where the pain comes from,

as if *I* am the king and this is *my* body.

As if, to end this suffering, mine are the eyes I must cut out.

Spending Days

He spends his days spitting sunflower seeds
into a red plastic cup
as my mother worries a hole
through her sleeves. The thumb
makes us human, she tells me.

I have not slept for two days
and in that time
I have seen so much.
A Japanese maple falling
in an abandoned backyard
during a late-night thunderstorm,
my mother hiding grapes
in the pockets of my blue jeans.
I discover them like an animal
discovering for the first time
its eyes.

One morning, an hour
before sunrise, he sends me
up a hill with a violin. At the top
he watches me play. Broken strings, broken
light. He complements me, says
it is like watching someone undress chords
with his fingers.

Like so many things
he never told me it was a punishment
and I never asked.

As morning comes, I consider the origins
of sunlight. How far it must have come
to get here. How far it would have to go
to escape.

How I Remember Him

Years later, walking past his house
in a thunderstorm, a nosebleed takes me

by surprise. Head thrown back, blood flows
down my neck. How

did he know?
A drop of blood falls

into a puddle at my feet
and slowly forms

his likeness.
Red eyes, red

mouth. Look
I am braver now.

Ripening

And suddenly, cleaning the bathroom mirrors
I saw myself
as he did.

Just to be sure
I whispered: *you are nothing*
like a first love
and the glass filled with black fog.

Early December
almost nine at night.
Inside, the lights
a bright hunger.
Outside, snowfall.

On the windows
our heat turns
into droplets of water

and I know some things
we will never get back.

Years ago, the doctor told me
I had a high tolerance
for pain.

I did not tell her
how I cried
when he did not touch me for a week.

April.
My mother peels the bruised skin
from ripe peaches

any excuse to talk to me.

That night, she will ask me
to take off my shirt
under the bathroom light.

Like a soldier feeling her way
through an abandoned house
she will trace her finger
over my back
with her left hand

her right hand gripping
a knife.

Again, he quiets us again
 he casts us
 like a shadow
at sunset
 the longest hour
 he tells us
 still, traces of a ghost
 in the river
 a grey stone lifted
 from boiling water
 if we must love
 an animal

I tell myself

 it's true
 the circle he made
on my skin
 is still a perfect shape

 it reddens
 at my touch

 it goes on
 forever

Like Nothing

When, finally, he found me.

We were drinking tea.

We never drank tea.

I was so happy

I kept adding water

so it would last.

We talked about David,

the cut

the broken baseball bat left

on his shin. What they meant when

they left us with a painting

of a gold fist and

a laurel wreath.

We talked long into the night

drinking one cup after another.

He warmed his hands

on the teapot.

The leaves bled

and bled.