

I Look For Her Mostly Everywhere

Memories of the Famine

i wonder if you
remember
all the embarrassing things i did
to impress you
like not
eating for several days straight until i
just couldn't take the ache in my stomach
i tried to ignore it
i was so desperate
to feel anything other than ugly and i could've sworn
you told me you loved me, or was it the sound of the scale
as it creaked for help,
beneath the pressure of my weight? was it the scrape of a barren fork
over a porcelain plate? i feel i am prone to mistake
pity for love. the way you looked at me—

well,
take a look now
—still starving with every meal.

Self-Portrait as a Poet Who Can't Stop Writing Self-Portraits

here, you are nineteen.
your father fishes for his truth, in expired scriptures
and in the shallows of your words.
you are named: vile sinner. righteous disappointment.
here, Love is promising your mother is with you
as your father attempts to strangle you.
here, Love is watching her leave.

here, you are twenty.
your boyfriend shows you he is not your boyfriend, through the medium of other people.
here, he confesses in a text message his desire for bodies that are not yours.
bodies that could never be yours, even if you tried.
here, you are trying.
here, Love is becoming temporary in place of permanency.
here, Love is watching him leave.

here, you are twenty-one.
the sunlight is dull and your room is blue.
you scroll through your phone. for hours. and, nothing.
here, you are measuring your self-worth in how long it takes for someone to say *happy birthday*
and one minute before it is no longer your birthday your boyfriend who is not your boyfriend
tells you he hopes you *enjoyed your day*.
here, you wished you were dying.
here, you thought dying synonymous with interesting. with remembered. with loved.

here, you are not.
escaping is convenient.
you cannot miss what you cannot see—
but still,
i look for you mostly everywhere
because here, you are a keeper.
because here, you must be a finder too.
here, are the love poems i have written for you.
here, Love is waiting.

The Calm Before the Storm

I.

She must have been waiting for the right moment.
Grasping at the life around her, holding it firm
in her frail hands. Until it was time to let go.

I remember her asking, “where am I?”

It was just a few days before—
before she died.

We—a collective voice above her head—
answered and told her “*Home.*”

I remember we said, “*you’re home now, Carlene.*”
And that put her at ease.

She didn’t speak again. Not even a word.

II.

And Monday, we went upstairs.

Comforted her dying body—realized
it was just that a body

when it was too late.

It was raining that day, too. A storm.

Like a fucking monsoon. Or typhoon.

(I don’t know the difference between the two).

But it caused the windows to crash open, the pictures
fell from the wall as
a wind swept through the house.

When they came to take her body away from us,
the skies cleared up. And the air was cold,
but at least it was still. I remember thinking
this can’t be real.

Last month, she was recovering. The whole
family was praying. We were willing
to make the necessary sacrifices to make sure

our home was hers.

I was going to quit school.
My mother was going to quit her job.
We stocked the pantry with applesauce
and fucking *Ensure* because she couldn't eat
anymore. We bought new vitamins and supplements.
We found new insurance policies.
We put a spare mattress
beside her bed, so we
could take watch when she slept. And it
wasn't enough.
I wanted it to be enough.

III.

At some point, I realized
it isn't about what I want.
I just couldn't tell you when.
And sometimes I forget, because
this reality is unfamiliar and it's
hard to accept.

Eventually I remember.
Eventually, I remember what matters.
And suddenly I don't want to be me anymore.
Suddenly I'm looking for all the ways I'm
like someone else. Because isn't that proof
that you're here, that you've been loved?
Even if only briefly, even if it wasn't enough.

Maybe I don't know what I'm talking about.
Maybe I do.

IV.

Though my grandmother suffered
from Dementia, and diabetes and most recently,
this God-forsaken Covid-19
I remember how she used to be.
A proud woman who loved her family.
One of the first, one of the only

who introduced me to *unconditionally*.
A word I still struggle to understand.

I remember she loved my Grandfather, too.
He's been gone ten years.

Last month, she sat in his reclining chair—
her sentences were starting not to make sense.
But she looked at his picture, put her hand to her brow.
Frustrated, she asked for the time. I replied.
She called back to me.
Fervently. Assuredly. Though she didn't have a clue
who I was.

"I've got to get home to Robbie." She said. Looked me
right in my eyes. Like it was a promise. Like she was sorry.
Like this was the calm before the storm, the warning I've been
searching for—

"I've got to get home to Robbie. I've got to get home."