

Bad Blood

your monthly bleeding stopped again
right when your red knuckles

cracked open into the wash bin and
stained the great white nightshirt

the farmer was so fond of, his eyes
never paler than in that shirt

narrowed when he saw the pink stain, he
flicked a great bear claw at you

a warning, to be sure, you wrapped
your knuckle in the first baby's

old swaddling cloth and your
stomach dropped to think

you would be needing it again soon
in the hot sun your bonnet

slips down your shoulders, rests
against the rifle slung

loosely and comfortably along your
back whenever you go

outside, you feel more comfortable
to have it there, even when

the farmer is within eyesight.
especially, maybe

if it is very cold and the wind
makes it hard to see

the baby who is no longer a baby
and stands on legs you don't

remember him ever growing
inside of you, turning your stomach

like the stream of vomit in your throat
which you let out into a soup

the farmer enjoyed anyway
because he knows no better

than to speak the language
of spitting out your ownership

the way he spit his seeds into you
the first time he fucked you, when

you swore you might love him and
his squeezing bear claws

tight around your arms and neck and
uterus swelling with the seed

of another fruit you don't remember
saying you liked the taste of

the first time the farmer fucked you
your eyes were shut but

you do not close your eyes now
that the baby has legs and

hands he got from his father, hands
that know too well what squeezing

is from grabbing everything his black
eyes see, this morning

the fire poker still hot, you burnt your
own hand making sure he

did not touch what would hurt him
you are tired of burning

for men you did not want to fuck
or give birth to, so tonight

when the moon is bright and the bear
is hibernating so peacefully

you almost could be convinced
he knows what gentleness is

you will take the poker from the still-burning
fire and go to the barn and leave

a glistening scarlet mess behind
the prize cow for which he paid

so many silver seeds and glowering
dangerously over his breakfast a few

hours later he will inquire into
the blood, not aware a cow

could make mistakes, he will furrow
his whole great face and you

will not cry or vomit this time but let her
take the blame for you and your blood

is hard to clean off the dirty straw
ground but you do it with the child

on your ankles and your knuckles
raw and terrible like the face

of the farmer, who late that night
will put a bullet in the head

of the prize cow and tell you
that is the price you pay

for bad blood.

Breath Elegy

It is hard to slow myself down to the size of a comma
to become the breath a sentence takes

to be the pebble that loves the punishment of the car
is as painful as the lips staring me down
across the barrel of the spun bottle

the kiss is a violent period
and I am unsung sentences, am silen

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I sleep the way a bullet train tears open the flesh of the night sky
(and I wake peering through these carved bars, enforcing
that I remain here, minimal and unimportant prisoner)

I take my cues from my smoke-soaked sweatshirt, which promises
nothing is as hard to run away from as breath

and as I stab my body through the thickness of spacetimeandmemory
my bloody forefinger sings a trailing, blazoned elipsis into the ground:

I am going

I am going

I am going

Cosmic Promise

The sun comes now, climbing up
up over the mountains
who just moments ago
were shrouded in the blue mist of early morning.

The sun arrives like a prayer, like a friend
in a moment of weakness, like something
I didn't know I was missing.

And she climbs now to bathe these mountains
(who are so much older than me. And wiser.)
in the glow of a wholly untouched day.

I want to be here to see it touched.
I want to watch children make footprints in sunlight,
dance and wade through this mystery substance
ready and hoping to take on the world
to fill the definition of the word *live*
with their spirit

Who will tell them they already are?
That sun rising, slow
mountains, upstanding
even me, sunlight catching my glasses
and hands, my knees warm
—all of us, in our way, fulfill
the great cosmic promise:

to take life as it is given
to treasure every mystery
and to love:
sunlight and one another

On Turning Eighteen and Loving Churches

Since turning eighteen, I have been in love with churches.

Big bulky buildings, old and immaculate
with one outstretched finger pointing straight up
to God, with praise and thanksgiving.

I like the reverence they demand, from a place deep within
silent and subtle as the stones they were carved from.

I like the ones that are so old their silence rings
in your ears, so old the silence in them is louder
than any other silence you've ever heard.

I like the panes of glass, rising so sharp and brightly colored
and threatening to shatter at the slightest sound—
the whole place begging to swallow you whole.

I like feeling small in churches. I like
being wrapped in time, like beholding the history of this silence.

I am in love with the quiet humanity of age
and the age of human quiescence. We, humans,
are alive and breathing and tiny everywhere.

Our molecules are made of holiness.

Our molecules are holy. Ivy, which grows always
towards the sun, is holy. A wide, expansive sky, shot through
with the wanting fingertips of trees is holy.

Dirt and dust and roots and the laughing gaiety of a stream
(well-hidden but never subtle) is church enough
heaven enough for all our gods and deities.

All our wondering and wandering.

An Ode To The Women I Work With

The women I work with stand all day long.
Their feet wear out sneakers quickly
from cups of soup droppped on the laces
toes stubbed on bar furniture older than they are
and so many strides taken to customers and tables
and the bar and the back and the ice machine. They complain
about everything and everyone, all day long
but rarely, somehow, their feet.

The women I work with have broad shoulders
and big hands. They paint their nails bright colors
to distract from the cracked skin. They are strong
and muscular in a way I almost don't notice
until an errant elbow nearly knocks me off my feet.
But when they pass behind me in the crowded spaces
we call home at work, they are gentle. Their hand is soft
on the small of my back as they pass by.

The women I work with want to lose weight.
I know this because they talk about it constantly.
They point to the soft places on their body, the underarm
and thigh, with disdain. "This'll never go away
if I keep eating so much bread." they say. I want to say
"Good!" I want to say, "Keep it! Your softness
is a reward for surviving so long in a world
bent against you." But I keep my mouth shut.

The women I work with sing while they fold napkins
or make salads, or deliver dinners, or pour drinks,
or mop spills, or clear dishes. They hum snatches
of songs lifetimes older than I am, and when they catch me
watching, listening, they grin sheepishly. They did not realize
they were singing aloud, they say.
Moments later they are dancing again to their own music
in the back, where no one can see.

The women I work with are rowdy and jocular, they are quick
to spread a salacious rumor, or provide color commentary
on the customers they know. They are world-weathered women
with old souls who have been around the block a time or two

and aren't afraid anymore. Outside of work they fight
battles bigger than I can imagine. They've lost children
or beat illnesses, or addictions, or bad marriages.
And they've come out kicking. And dancing. And singing.