

After They Sold the Cows, But Before They Cut Away the Pines

Wine-fed and lying in truck beds thrown open,
we had gathered in a field to watch meteor showers
but first noticed the moon, halved
and upward-facing like a bowl to hold
every flinch, every shiver, every *amen* come Sunday.

Firelight would have drowned out the celestial,
so we grasped at each other for warmth.
We played geography, we played guess-the-headlights,
we played sing-the-tree-line-to-sleep.

We awoke with the warblers at dawn, dew seeped
into the openings of our sleeping bags.
Together, we excavated the remnants of the night.
Blushing and lacking pavement to guide us,
we drove along the barbed-wire fence,
hoping to cross it as we had the night before,
without piercing our skin.

The Choctaw Indians Under the Bed

The picture was boxed in forest green and dust,
waiting to be discovered in the space beneath
my grandmother's brick-hard mattress.

Man and woman, field-worn and dark-skinned,
they glared at me. These two stood upright,

holding their half-filled baskets in front of them.

Behind them grew rows of cotton.

And I wondered, if they could see me,
would they string beads in my straw-like hair?

If they could see me, would they touch

this skin that the sun bites into, chews,
and spits out? Would they scold
me for slouching and step forward
to straighten my spine?

Would they teach me dying

words that would hang in my throat
like phlegm in Southern spring?

Would they say *Oh my, how you've grown,*
we remember... or just return to their work,
pulling at the bolls more forcefully?

Justification

It's ok because I only count
when I'm bored, she says, noticing
every percussive pen click against
legal pad from across the gap
between her and Dr. Drivel.
Behind her back she lifts
and curls her fingers in multiples
of three with each beat.
The inspirational posters and books
with well-worn spines don't distract
enough from the floor tiles, arm freckles
and kaleidoscopes that need to be inventoried.

Just like the asphalt and white
lines of highways are not enough
to keep her from turning her attention
to the passing cars as she paces home.
There is not enough time to number them all,
to make sure that she's seen the correct
amount before she can go inside.
So she takes the longer way, dodging
through alleyways and neighborhoods.

She turns the knob back and forth
three times before heading indoors,
announcing her arrival.

It's ok because at night I can rest,
she says, turning the light off with
the normal click, click, click.
She turns over three times
like an alligator in a death roll
with a dog,
and gives thanks for the dark,
and gives thanks for the dark,
and gives thanks.

A Strange Offspring

Junior high experimenter,
wisp-banged boy who swabbed
the corners of my locker
while I stood, kicking at a patch
of dried gum on the short, grey carpet,

if then I could have seen the bacteria
swelling in shades of white, green,
and yellow, I wouldn't have volunteered,
raising my hand and wiggling my fingers
under the fluorescent lighting.

Later, we gazed at the Petri dish,
a fertile culture blooming
below us, condensation
lapping the lid.
A girl chortled

two rows over, called me
moldy Mona. You slid
your nails underneath
the tape, opened the container,
and released our spores.

Found After the Sudden Storm With Straight Line Winds

This light switch, useless.

That half-green, half-rust
lawn chair lost.

Torn bits of yesterday's news:
the school's successful play,
the congressman's unsuccessful affair.

Power lines snaked
across the asphalt.

This pup thrown
against the shed's aluminum side.

This house halved by a pecan tree.
Parking lot puddles reflecting
our cheeks, the sun.

This corn crop's thirst quenched.

These ponds teeming,
this conversation overflowing.