

A Body That Dreams

I. No Palace

when my great grandfather
rode the horses he thought of no man
and no country

we used to dance for him
in the living room
in front of his armchair,
my sister and I

there is no language too simple

twist of mouth
dry lips
shaking hands
the tv always singing

there is no way out of this
except back then
when the water broke
over the earth
and he came home

don't tell me that we could have saved him
that his orchard was no palace
the least of these saved
by snakes in the red dawn of the dirt
the least of these cracked open
in early morning
by children climbing over branches
their fingers the kill
their fingers his last of these

I drew him a picture of a horse
and sent it in the mail
and we did not see him

don't tell me that they bought an empty house,
that to be brave is to be young
and coming up over the horizon

night falls in the orchard
and mustangs ride
out from the living room
into the world,
his quiet breath,
his unspoken god.

II. Eve at the Window

If spring comes
it is because we still deserve it.

The cherry blossom trees
shrink back into themselves
like fists closing.

Perhaps someday
we will have said goodbye
to the garden.

Eve traces its petals,
her fingertips dipped in pollen.
She sucks the gold from her mouth
and looks over at Adam
where he sleeps
with the apple still hanging in his throat,
never dislodged,
for at night the sweetness
still colors the breath of his dreaming.

She gets up
and treads in padded feet to the kitchen,
pours a glass of water,
stares out the window at the ghosts
of the cherry blossom trees blurred like smoke,
lovers intertwined.

Perhaps this is the only story.

Outside the kitchen window
the years are turning.
The trees orbit around themselves,
the light folding back into itself,
sweetness rupturing like small bombs
in the mouths of flowers.

Soon it will be gone from her.
She closes her fists.

We must deserve it, she thinks.
We must.

III. *Bitch*

is a word we learned from our mothers.

No man taught us the sharpness
of its syllables,
punch of tongue hard yet rounded,
parted lip of desire, no man
taught us this.

We taught it to ourselves,
tightening of thighs,
that original fire,
closed eyes like smoldering.

You could tell me
when you felt it first,
but you would be lying.

Maybe you didn't know you had a name
until you were called this word,
and never did it hurt more
than from a woman,
as every soft thing rises up from childhood,
the weapon your ten-year-old self
holds with her fists,

that right to a body that dreams
and is therefore dangerous.

When he says it first
she has already heard it,
her daughter has already felt it move
in her sleep
like the curtains in her window
billowing from the wind of breath,
cheeks puffed in the exhale,
(mouth full).

Call her Evelyn, Eve, even,
when man's ribs first ruptured
and she grew out of bone
like the production of those syllables.

Bitch

says,
call me Mother,
call me whatever you want,
for *I am*,
anyway.

You could tell me
who said it to you first
but you would be lying

because that ten-year-old
still has her sword,
and the mouth its teeth,
and the body its answer.

IV. My Grandfather Writes Lilies from Prison

the cavities of a family
spring over us
generation after generation
grow like lilies,
the holes
when everything parted

in his sleep
they are singing him forgiven
in his sleep
he has never touched the face of god

he loves he loves he loves
figure in the guest room
the basement
the back door
he loves he loves he loves
body hungry.

I cannot forgive you.

to be unknown
is to be beautiful

take it back.
unknow you, unknow you,
figure in the dark rooms
of an old world,
your hands on them.

take it back

I have never dreamed you as less.
free for ten years
and still you write from prison.
still my grandmother wakes early,
goes to the church
and puts flowers on the altar,
Mary in white,
lilies

how do you keep the hours?

at his funeral we will speak of nothing
and filter out into the street,
undo the mistake.

at five years old i sat on his lap
and touched his cheek.

to be loved
to be unknown

still he writes.
lilies over the house,
bodies blown back,
small bodies open to him

they speak for him.
in the end,
we all do.