

# *The Beauty in Marrow*

A vivid collection about the coexistence of chaos, calamity, brokenness, and strength that is necessary for womanhood. You can only find the life-giving fortitude of marrow when you break your bones.

(Trigger warning: self-harm, abortion, domestic violence, substance abuse, gun violence, molestation.)

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## Her

this poem is for her  
stitching up wounds from twelve years ago  
out of her teens and still unsure if she goes  
both ways  
hating birthdays cuz they're reminders that  
she's closer to death  
at one point she wanted that  
cut/purged/hurt herself in an effort to forget  
she was herself

this poem is for her  
in a clinic for the third time with a womb  
he suggested she turn into a burial ground  
but the real tomb is her heart every time  
he knocks her down cuz she don't understand  
why she still loves him

this poem is for her  
married/divorced/remarried/single/alone/  
reclusive/elusive/polyandrous/straight/gay/queer  
here

this poem is for her  
too narrowly defined and more than meets the eye  
too easily denied and more often dismantled and untied

than uplifted and inspired

this poem is for her

wherever it finds her

and i hope she writes her own version of it

when it feels right for her

## Tapestry

There are dangling threads and strands  
frayed and loose hanging around the hems  
of my skin.

Two knotted a long time ago then ripped to  
shreds and were never able to mend.  
And I am their tapestry, their crooked  
cloth, their patch on ripped knee jeans  
and snagged shirts.

Sometimes we all tangle into each other,  
and I feel one's blue-black eyes the same  
way I feel the other's doped veins and venom.  
They are separate ends of the same bolt of  
fabric, and I am all that joins them now.

Sometimes I want to be my own, not theirs.

I am them even when I hate it.  
Hate hanging on to what I think is their  
regard for me by a thread.  
Hate safety pinning the pieces they've left  
me with just to make something wearable.  
I am wearing too big and too small skin that  
they draped and stretched over me when  
they felt like it, and now I am old enough to  
tailor myself into whatever I want to be.

Of course I will have to washboard bathe the  
rags I have been for twenty years,  
but once I am wrung out and hung to drip dry  
I will soak up sun like it is all that can revive  
the colors of my cloth that have faded.  
And I will wear the two ends of my newly  
stitched garment, and their knots and  
tangles will not strangle me  
but they will make me whole.

## Inquiries on the Meeting of Birth and Burial Ground

—for Sybrina Fulton, Lesley McSpadden, Gloria Darden, Geneva Reed-Veal, and every mother who has buried a stolen child

Have you ever asked her what it's like  
carrying stillborns in her womb?  
To know her seeds are flowering  
only to be snatched up like weeds?  
Have you tried to look past her eyes  
and into the empty space carved out in her soul  
for ruptured membrane and crushed bones?

If she told you would you understand  
how bathing babies feels like readying to  
wring out bloodied clothes?  
How nursing her children foreshadows  
breathing resuscitation into their bodies?  
If she said she expects the doctor to hand her  
birth and death certificates on the same day  
would that mean anything to you?

Does it make her heroic or insane  
to birth children who might never  
reach adulthood?  
Is her heart home or hearse to her lineage?  
Can she hear hope rumbling in her belly  
over the sound of barrels and bullets

midwifing her fear?

Will she hug and kiss

or eulogize and bury her future today?

Will her motherhood always be marked

by questions and memory?

## Symphony in D

When darkness enters you  
there is no way to push back its hands,  
groping and grabbing at yet undeveloped chords,  
stroking and stealing the naïveté of prepubescent melodies

Darkness has a familiar face,  
gentle, welcoming, reassuring, childlike—  
friendly

Your insides clink and clatter  
like maracas, tambourines, high hat cymbals  
but your music is crashing to a crescendo  
you cannot control

You have never broken a bone before,  
still you are certain that darkness has  
fondled fortissimo fractures all over you

And by the time your notes and clefs  
rearrange to sound beautiful again  
nothing is fine-tuned enough to undo  
darkness's cacophony

## Beauty in Her Marrow

inhaling paradise feels like kissing  
the glass partitioning forever and the end

amethyst rain pirouettes through begging vessels,  
and she is fifteen minutes freer than five seconds ago

shrouded in superhuman flight

she hovers  
over thirteen-year-old yesterday  
flashes of women who look too much like she  
entwine their trembling fingers with hers  
teaching her how to b r e a t h e

and the air up here is glorious

white, shining, sparkling til it glares, til it blinds  
bounteous and aromatic enough to choke  
her into unconsciousness

breath is heavy

heavy

when it is a relevé and plié gasping through her pulse and ribs,  
somersaulting to a sudden scream,



when it is the soundtrack to her priceless transaction

selling and buying she knows

colliding and collapsing she knows

shatters and splinters she knows

even redemption and renewal she knows

but does she know that there is air yet more divine than this?

the clouds gathering for torrent and storm around her cyclone

can grand jeté too

though she is looking through lenses

fogged and blurred by ragged breathing now,

once she is ready to collect the cracked and calcified frame

meant to hold her upright,

she will again see the beauty in her marrow