

## Horse Farm

Last night I was having sex  
With a boy you would have liked  
About half way through the act  
he started thrusting into me too fast  
and an ache ripped through the center of my body  
In the shaking unmade bed  
with my head  
buried in his bobbing chest.

For a moment I left the bed and the boy behind  
And I started thinking about your horse farm,  
how we stood in the room above the horses  
riding in circles  
and in the cold  
you leaned on me for warmth.  
How good it felt to be useful to you.

I knew that it was okay,  
that sex hurts sometimes  
Because it all hurts  
To give your body to someone else

They had to cut me out of my mother and she saw it all  
I was pulled out screaming and uncaring  
Stopping only for a moment to put my head on her chest  
Before I wore through the skin on her nipples  
and the calm in her brain.  
And I didn't care when I saw her  
lay her hands in her head and cry.

My great great grandpa didn't get to the age of 24  
before the fever started to take hold  
At eighteen he started training for war  
He smoked cigars rolled in Cuba  
and ate chicken slathered in lard  
And tested gas masks in sealed foggy rooms  
to see what a man could withstand.

The masks didn't work  
and he learned the lesson hard for his government  
The effects of gas on the body,  
The coughing and the shakes  
His lungs swelled to melons and his face turned yellow

As he lay dying an order was made  
for artists to paint for the soldiers  
rolling in their yellowing bed sheets  
So they would have something of this world  
to bring with them to the next.

In exchange for their bodies,  
They got a picture the size of a postcard.

My great great grandpa was sent home  
and died from the sickness  
in his mother's house in New Jersey  
with the technicolor painting by his side.  
And he was proud.  
He didn't even have to leave home  
to give his life for someone else.

Sometimes I have sex  
like a creature is taking hold of me from the inside  
and my body is no longer mine.  
But was my body ever mine  
Is anyones?

After the sex the boy held me in his arms  
and said nothing at all,  
I could feel his warm chest against my back  
and his quiet satisfied breathing  
and I too was proud.

I know that you are mean to me  
You correct my form with burning fingers  
and again and again my body disobeys me in your presence  
But my body was never really mine  
and I can stand the meanness

Because you don't know how else to hold me.

I have found  
That life isn't supposed to feel good  
No one ever told me it was  
But I had to learn it for myself.

### Hungry

To get home I have to travel under the bridge  
stretching for blocks over the vacant streets  
It's splattered with gray sooty dirt and bits of white pigeon shit.  
Every stranger I pass holds something for me  
A word or a call  
They flick their tongue over their teeth  
like they want to bite me open.

And maybe these men aren't looking at me  
Maybe they walk the length of the bridge thinking of home  
and their buddies and the movie they watched last night  
And their eyes are simply darting  
and their lips are really just pursed in thought  
But as I march  
I feel like pieces of my body will be pulled apart  
and divided among the men  
like how the wolves tore through the body of my mother's dog  
after he broke away from her in the mountains.

We found his collar strung up along a tree  
And his little foot was left buried under a rock,  
We knew it was his because half of the nails had been cut,  
This had been done the day before, by my mothers doting hand,  
before he squirmed away to jump on her bed,  
unaware of how much she was giving him.

He wasn't meant to be out there  
He didn't know anything about the mountains  
and the bigger things they held.  
The dogs out there are not like him,

They never knew the pesky touch of a washcloth  
or the taste of canned meals.  
They never waited for their dinner on white marble floors,  
they never begged under yellow dining room tables.  
No one else was there to feed them.  
He couldn't have known that they eat dogs like him for sport.

A girl I loved was picked up in a car  
along a dark street in South Carolina  
A college girl, fed on supermarket chicken  
and baby carrots from the produce section  
She was taken by a man fed on nothing but fists to the mouth  
and the taste of things left over  
And she didn't know him  
She didn't know that he wanted her,  
she didn't know why he needed her  
But they found her bright orange coat  
caked in mud, left in woods miles away.

We never found out if the man was hungry anymore  
After he took her  
But we all were  
Hungry for him.

I don't really think the empty parts of the street  
Are all filled with wolves  
But every glance to the side of my face  
Every whispered word as I pass by  
Feels to me like the men are gathering for a feast.

### Birth

I was born underweight and covered in hair,  
yellow, and strangled by my own umbilical cord.  
I was kept under heat light, under glass  
and fed through tubes so I wouldn't die  
before I could take my first breath.

My grandma described it to me laughing,

She said I looked like a supermarket chicken,  
the tubes were my wrappings and  
I was some kind of monster, some kind of mutated bird  
that everyone ran from

When I grew up  
I wanted to feel tightness on my throat  
as if I were a baby again  
As if I were free  
When I was all tied up  
like a chicken being prepared.  
It didn't feel like dying,  
it was something I had felt before,  
a tugging in my chest,  
a yellow light washed over everything  
and made it beautiful again.  
It gave the world a simpleness.

And I wanted his hands on my throat  
like I could finally be free  
and nothing would need me ever again  
like a bird  
A bird that wasn't raised for the kitchen table  
and I leaned into it all with a bit of fear,  
my stomach leaping like I was dropped  
on one of those roller coasters  
hundreds of feet above the ground.

I thought that I'd found it,  
the thing I have been missing ever since  
I'd gotten it the first time. The choking.  
But he took his hands away from my neck  
and I begged him to come back to me.  
He just shook his head,  
And I layed down in my day bed  
that could have easily been a crib or a deathbed  
And I thought that maybe  
nothing would ever be that simple again.

## Monthly Sacrifice

When I was twelve I sat in a cafe  
Blood leaked through my jeans  
and stained my chair like a tap I couldn't turn off  
I gaped as pieces of myself were falling out onto the floor  
If I stayed too long it would become an ocean  
and drown every stranger talking and laughing and working  
in that little space.

I ran into the bathroom  
But It kept coming out until drops stained the checker tiled floor  
and the crisp white wall that had looked so clean  
Shocking spots of red  
I had been so careless

I pictured every boy out there seeing my chair  
and they would be drawn to its glow  
like it was some curse destined to be unburied  
and they would laugh and laugh  
until I could never leave this bathroom,  
and then maybe they wouldn't know who had left the blood,  
and no one from my old life would remember me either  
because I had hidden for so long.

The blood poured out of me into the toilet  
and I briefly wondered if I could die from this,  
Lose so much blood  
that I would just fall down on the bathroom floor  
Found hours later with my pants down.  
A death no one could ever see.

Using bleach from under the sink  
I crouched on my hands and knees,  
scrubbing the floor of blood.  
I just wanted it to look like it had before  
but I knew it would never be that way again  
I couldn't bear to leave something of myself on that floor.  
I scrubbed and scrubbed until my knees burned from crouching  
and my hands shriveled from the chemicals

And my nose could smell nothing else.

When I stepped out of that door  
Light headed and sheepish  
After what must have felt like hours  
An older woman, well versed in the art of monthly sacrifice  
caught my eye and looked at me with a small smile

She knew it all,  
how the pain comes in jabs  
like my womb is being chewed through by a wolf,  
and I can't stop it  
I stare down at it on my knees like I'm praying  
like I'm looking into its face  
But it just keeps on feeding

In the small tilt of her head  
I knew  
and she knew  
that it would be hard to escape this body.

I went home to my twin bed that I'd long since outgrown  
and traced the plastic stars  
put up years before  
By another's hands.

I promised myself that one day I wouldn't be like this  
All chafed and stinging, stuck in small places.  
One day I will be grown,  
living in some city where no one knows me  
And the pain will shrink to nothing in my hands  
And the earth won't groan when I move  
and the boys won't laugh when I speak  
And I'll finally know what to do with myself.

### Playing Sick

Today I woke

hands swollen, face puffy, legs tired  
and a tickle in my throat.  
I'm dying, I thought  
And I'll be found in my pink bed  
with my socks tucked between the sheets,  
Naked except for my underwear with the day of the week,  
"Monday," printed in glitter on the front.  
But it's a thursday and something is going wrong inside again  
And I will watch my body disobey me  
As angels above let me roll and turn in the heat  
and sit with the damage my body gives me.  
They shake their hallowed heads  
like the school nurse as I roll and groan in my skin.  
I tell them I'm decaying and they ask me if I want a box of milk  
Small and white with a pointed lip.  
I take it because I know they can't do anything else for me.

Maybe I used up my grace when I was young  
And pain was sewed into my skin like pearls  
I remember the school nurse  
The milk was sweet with crystals of ice at the center  
I would have preferred a chocolate milk  
But it was banned from our cafeteria the year before  
along with white bread, mozzarella sticks, and tubes of cherry ice.  
And I wished my mom would come to get me  
and take me with her to her job in the sky  
But I'm here with Ayesha or Mildred again.  
In the small room plastered with photos of the human body,  
of disembodied hands being washed,  
lungs peeking through the translucent form of a faceless man,  
and round faces marked with growing grimaces and tears  
to represent the scale of pain.

The room between where I was and where I want to be  
A haven if only for a minute  
There was hope in the blue plastic waiting chairs  
And for the children that frequented them.  
Kids with pain that went deep beyond their skin  
Pain that an ice pack and a bag of pretzels would not fix.



I went there everyday begging for something  
I knew not what  
I returned again and again  
But the illness wouldn't fade  
And nothing was ever amiss  
in the plastic sheathed thermometer  
Or the canvas of my skin.  
I kept trying to show the sickness,  
In my groaning and my drooping head  
until the nurse told me I wasn't really sick  
and the angels told me I was wasting their time,  
and there was no one for me.  
Nowhere for me to go for my stomach ache  
and my liars tooth and my fake broken ankle  
and my body being held together by a thread.