

## Transience

For a moment I see the world  
as fleeting as my breath  
under the shadows at the threshold  
of this wood.  
I stretch my hands toward boughs  
of juniper and spruce,  
wondering—  
what if the world shattered at my touch?  
I bury my hands in my pockets  
to be safe,  
hesitating at the edge, lingering  
in liminality. I breathe in  
the zest of salt and pine, thrust back my shoulders,  
and take a step

through the border of brambles and weeds  
across dead needles. The chill mutes  
the scent of over-ripe blackberries  
that snag my clothes, stinging my palms,  
reality in scarlet lines.

I wander the path until I hear  
a tributary. I find it winding  
through sweetgrass and windflowers,  
a spear of sunlight piercing the canopy,  
gold under the water's surface.  
The knotted roots of an ash  
cling to the opposite bank. Its mossy trunk twists  
broken, half-bared branches toward a sky  
hidden by pines. A heart  
is gouged into its trunk, flaking bark  
over initials of lovers from long ago.  
Did they hope to outlast the world?  
I brush my fingers along the stinging marks  
blackberries drew on my skin.  
Will I outlast the ash?

I listen to the trill of a robin...  
...but time needles into my bones,  
so I turn from the creek  
and retrace my steps to the border  
of brambles and weeds.  
I am transient, I know,  
fleeting as green grass,  
summer rain...  
while the bones of an ash marked with love  
will stand after I've decayed  
to dust.

## Sky Captain

I hunker in sagebrush, watching  
Sego Lilies bobbing white bonnets  
as a breeze slithers past.  
Dust smells like home,  
coats my white tennis shoes,  
grays my navy hoodie,  
coils in the air.

Rushing, winding, reveling,  
the wind gusts, tugs at my hands,  
rises and urges me to leap,  
cry to the sky for rain and bluster  
as colors burst and gray above  
boils and twists silver shapes, figures  
following as I dash past Grandpa's  
weathering log hotel.

My ship sways beyond the cabin,  
teeter-totters rocking in the wind.  
I rush up the plank, call my ghost-sailors,  
Release the sails! Heave the anchor! Ride the storm!  
Power old tire engines, climb the crow's nest,  
grasp the helm, let sky splinter.  
Rain pelts against wood as spectral sails billow  
and my galleon rises to the sky.

## **You Are My Mother**

You are  
the shortest in our yellow kitchen,  
a giant in glasses and green speckled apron,  
the dusty blue hat bobbing, bending  
over churned earth in a weedy garden.

You are  
tart fruit in sweet honey,  
a taut mouth softening to smiles,  
a tense jaw loosening with laughter  
as you charge into our pillow fight.

You are  
the needle stitching up my heart  
your calloused hands once tore open,  
the instructor demonstrating  
how true healing hurts.

You are  
the one I take for granted. I forget  
the years of scrubbing dishes,  
of banishing migraines with firm fingers,  
of medical bills and vet bills.

I won't forget again. I'm broken  
but I won't blame you anymore  
because you spend each day teaching me  
love  
is cast in service, set in action,  
not in accidental barbed words,  
not suffocating perfection and false smiles.

You are  
the framework of my being,  
the foundation of my family,  
like roots and trunk and branches  
all lifting me to the sun.

## **Drops of Innocence**

As a child, I  
explored the edges of campus  
counted the burning leaves  
raced past buildings  
with my coat flapping behind  
the wind chasing me  
leaves whirling in spirals.

It was fragile  
like spun glass orbs  
in Mother's garden,  
each curse muttered in my ear  
each kick against my tattered  
brown bus bench  
shattering a drop of innocence.

Now I'm older  
and the leaves are rotting  
as people trample them underfoot  
and the wind stings my eyes  
as I huddle in my coat  
and shamble from one building to the next  
hunching under a bag of bricks.

**Consider this, friends.**

I'm classic white meat in a small western town  
who can count the black people I know on one hand,  
no blood outside Europe, no color, Hitler's blue-eyed blonde, beautiful ideal.  
Some might hold it against me, I might hold it against myself  
because I never had to worry people would stare or stereotype me by skin tone  
or assume I was in college to fulfill a minorities quota. People take it  
for granted I'm normal and functional because  
I'm a middle-class white college girl, inexperienced  
and almost innocent. I have no criminal record  
and I never drink beer or smoke pot, and that's normal  
because I'm white in a white neighborhood so no one questions  
my goody-two-shoes attitude 'cause that's just the way white girls  
are supposed to be. So I guess in a way I'm stereotyped by skin,  
but only through eliminating the negative attitudes that segregate  
and discriminate our brothers and sisters of different colors and cultures.  
But in spite of my inexperience at least I *know* they are my brothers and sisters  
and to hell with color and culture and lines and labels  
since no one thing can define us, we are all kaleidoscopes of thought  
and I'm only white in the whites of my eyes and they're only black in their pupils.  
We're ivory and tan and sandy and brown and earthy and cinnamon,  
but we aren't black and white 'cause the whole world just won't function  
if we don't meet in the middle and accept shades of grey.  
To hell with it! I wish to yell, we're all human and why does the rest even matter  
when we all feel and we think and we love and we hurt  
and wars are fought from every side to protect something important.  
I am and will always be a white girl from white meat  
but please God, oh please let's just all agree I'm no better or worse  
than someone from Africa or India or Indonesia! They're all so beautiful  
with families and songs and prayers and games, and one day I found  
more in common with a teacher from Jordan than the girl down the street.  
I don't even know if I have the right to say all this and I'm sure  
someone won't like these words, but for goodness' sake  
differences wouldn't matter so much if we stopped searching for them  
and began to find out how we're all the same.