

BLACK LEAVES

Each branch is a grave
a cemetery of sap
liquid life from your corpses
still fertilize our soil
A century later, we remember you all
In dreams, our roots crawl
and claw out from the earth
cleaving a path
to decades that passed
Our roots shake off dirt and extend out
like shields
and fists that fly out
to zealous shotguns and blades
Our branches break chains
then snatch the lit match
We kick kegs of coal oil,
kerosene, and gas
all before they can douse you
and roast you part-way,
extinguish you, then repeat it
to prolong your pain
Crispy bones, splintered and flaked
like smoldering foliage
like mutilated fruit
popping and sizzling alive
Bruised produce pulled down
our exhausted limbs until
parts of us broke
by the weight of your crops
The Klan-led crowds shot you, but shot holes in us, too
though we bled only sugar and minerals
But in dreams, we rescue you
before they can torture you
before our timber ingests
your blackened Black flesh
In dreams, we hoist ourselves up by our trunks
free to fall on their carnivals of cruelty
Yet dreaming won't right the ungodly wrong

of twitching bodies that once scraped our bark
We deteriorate
a century late
ashamed to dream as you toss in the dark

WET NURSE

The weight of their small hands lifts from your head
when they see your struggling suddenly end
Their movements and innocent laughter dies
as you float toward the porcelain rim
I hear you call me from the coldness
Torrential cries pour out of your mouth
You stand slowly with bloated arms raised
for me to lift you out
My heart ruptures and drains
saturating my soul with curdled blood
Organs bob and drown in a swamp of grief
I follow your cries into blackness's abyss
Then I breathlessly I take you into my breast
and hold you there daily at the neighbor's pool
until they come delicately to escort me
to my new inpatient home
Strong drugs keep me half-sane twice a day,
though still flooded with agony-drenched nightmares
Submerged in trauma, I cradle you, precious boy
I ache for you and eternally nurse you
But my nurse hands me assorted pills with a drink
as a damp doll rests limp on my feverish chest,
a substitute bundle of my entire world
This isn't my baby! This isn't my son!
Now the pastor has come with the congregation
Oh my pain-soaked soul and diluted strength!

Pray for me Pastor! For my agitated mind
"But your son's still alive at the pool," Hope lies
Quick! Pastor, beg the Lord for a miracle then!
And then I feel the vibrations...
from deep groans gurgling through soggy whimpers
Overwrought and quaking, I snatch you up from the ground
With your cheeks to my breast, my warm milk lets down
in streams of sparkling iridescent white rain
that bursts forth before the hind milk,
awaiting its creamy river
of glistening white pearls to shower over small puckered lips
You latch on! It's a miracle! Praise God! Thank You Lord!
But my nurse is still passing me my pills
She readjusts the limp doll in the cradle of my arms
so the milk sprays on silicone cheeks
"It's alright," she assures me "lay down with your baby,
he'll always be there in your sleep."

Mistaken Pond

The light made me feel like I was in love
The sun used to call me
He told me his name
Without reason or warning, his rays escaped
Now, estranged from the sun
trees have darkened my bridge
And these trees,
who bore witness,
claim there was no love
The trees insist I saw no sun
They pack themselves in so I can't trace your light
A perpetual green impersonating the night
They mock my heartache and toss down their leaves
As my rotting planks shifted
and my bridge nearly crumbled
I thought then, in my water, that you might appear.
I know there's a sun!
You told me your name!
Oh my sweet life, return to me!
There's no life without light!
There's no movement without sun!
Oh, my radiant day, remember me
Though the trees show their scorn and they make me a fool
I'll love you again, if you'll prove them wrong
I'll wait for your warmth, if I don't see you first
as the trees crack their bark,
smirking at such hope

THE WORM

His eyes arrested mine
as gregarious caterpillars thronged him
His social status overawes me:
The Butterfly Echelon

Hordes of socialites never flock
to my empty corner
Acquaintances don't swarm around me
like parasitic maggots
My cell phone never rings so often it's peculiar
to feel its silence in my purse
or to find "missed call" alerts

No, I'm the pitiable larva
ignored at all the gatherings,
unnoticed and unpopular
Yet guiltless of societal crimes

My only offense is not learning
the art of working a crowd,
metamorphosing to a chrysalis
I'm not so much as a moth
but merely an earthworm who cowers
in the soil of exotic gardens
Just passing through, I am pressed
by a myriad of wings

In my own soil I expand
and lift my head from the dirt
and slither freely over sidewalks
never fearing I'll be crushed

Maybe he glares at me
not because he pities me
Maybe he sees I exist
even without elegant wings
My colors aren't loud and haughty
like caterpillars who've changed
And I'll bet it's exhausting to be
commandant of the butterfly ranks

He may even *envy* a worm like me
unmolded and free of cocoons
If he glances again, I'll smile and say
"Welcome to sweet insignificance"

GUISADA

eyes were in the stew
bones bobbed to the surface
throbbing tendons with raw ligaments still attached to splintered shins

there was foam over the meat
lips severed from the face
a tongue saturated in prayer previously frozen with diced desires

there were veins inside the broth
a turned stomach sunk beneath
painted fingernails scraped the Teflon off the insides of the pot

bended knees were in the water
a bloated heart seared and chopped
sundried and grinded faith marinated the whirling fragments of skin

then a soul was dipped out with a soup spoon
colorless passions clumped together
improperly seasoned longings had no chance to dissolve in his love

a torn girl is in the stock...
her expressions are bland
her boyfriend's concoction

too cold for the next man to touch