

SUNSET OF SUMMER

The county was more hazardous then, but of course we didn't know that. We biked no-hands on the pocked roads, tires bald and brakes bitchy. Our braids fluttered like let-go reins, flip-flops gnarled by the pedals' teeth, shorts shortened by the crease of our hips.

In the sunset of summer, we'd ditch the bikes on the edge of the Barnes' second cut alfalfa field to watch the shirtless high school boys buck bales into the truck's bed, their glistening chests broad and breathtaking, abs slickening the trail of dark diving under the button flies of their Levi 501's. We hid in the wispy stalks so the boys wouldn't see

what their bodies did to our own. We were quiet during those watchings, unsure of what we wanted to do made us into. Sometimes it seemed they knew we were there, maybe saw the girl-shaped damage our bodies caused the crop. They stuffed snuff between their lip and teeth, spat in whatever direction they pleased.

At least one of them would later discover what we hid that day. Another, how the jaws of a shattered windshield rearranges the skin. Another, the delicacy of the neck when encountering concrete. Another, how heavy a child is when freed from the weight of living.

We waited for the last bale-bucking as the sky cycled through every shade of Starburst. The boys, indistinguishable silhouettes against the smoldering gold of the fields. When everyone was gone, it was too dark to ride home but we did anyway, the night's balmy breath burrowing into our billowing shorts, drenching our lungs, slathering itself over the yet-to-be-claimed universe of our skin.

BOMBARDMENT

-After Larry Lewis

I remember, tonight, only details: a butter-yellow brush, the tornadoes of hair we hid in Delilah's desk. The oink-oinks that rawed our throats whenever she walked by. My best friend's twin braids tick-tocking while she scribbled *I will not* on the chalkboard after the incident with the rubber cement. The faux-fur coat Delilah never took off, not even for Bombardment or the Pattycake Shuffle in the stench-stuffed gym. The scent of sitting next to her, like laundry forgotten in the washer. Delilah was only in our fifth-grade class until winter break, and when school started back up in January, all focus was on another classmate, whose sister had been decapitated in a car accident with her boyfriend on an icy New Year's Eve. We practiced that word over and over, each syllable tight and quick as a Black Cat firecracker, *de-cap-i-tate*. We had no idea yet how our bodies worked, what parts we'd be expected to offer, what pieces we'd spend the rest of our lives losing. My mother later told us why Delilah had never taken off her coat, what her father had finally admitted, but by then it was summer, we were onto tank tops and must-have shorts, our hips branded with a soaring stitched dove.

A LITTLE CLOSER

Even though the technician apologizes beforehand,
the cool of her hand on my breast snags my inhalation.
Relax, she says. I listen and loosen into the belly
of her palm. Her lifeline bisects the underneath, reveals
as much as any hazy image if only we trusted skin
over science. A second palm, and I'm shrouded in an ocean
of skin. Have I ever been touched with such tenderness,
nothing expected in return?

When my mother was dying, I crawled into her cot, draped
her dead-to-the-world arm over my chest. There was no reason
to think she knew I was there, but I asked her to hold me anyway.
Like that, we creatured for the last time. Mother, unbecome.
Daughter, canvas of abandoned scars.

A little closer, the technician says, and when she releases
my breast to the compressor it's a moment as lonely as any.
Tell me when the pressure is almost too much, she says.
But her touch is now a ghost I haven't yet met. I'm a year ago,
breath storming my lungs under the weight of my mother's arm,
her slowing pulse like the technician's promise, *It's almost over now*.

SACRUM TO SKULL

How old were you when you first knew your body belonged to the world? The parts you'd thought yours: the vein-squiggled belly of elbow, the staircase of bone from sacrum to skull, the tinny sockets smudging dark the smile: what made you think you could keep it for yourself? Your mother knew this, as mothers do, but she let you believe you had a say. So, you said it: *Mine, Mine, Mine*, but each time you spoke, something exploded. Today, you know what's what. You see valleys carved into your forehead, the lost caverned in their echo. Your stomach, a pale November sky. Your breath, a blizzard. Heart, a hurricane.

DUSK OF THIRTEEN

We were in the dusk of thirteen and the carnival was in town. All bitch and bite, jeans so tight our crotches ached, armed with McDonald's OJ, my brother's vodka, a 10 pm curfew.

Teen Magazine told us how to get noticed, so we walked in slow motion past the carnies: their eyes stitched to our asses, feather roach clips swaying from their earlobes.

They smiled, mouths more black than bone, licked their lips with Jumbo-dog tongues. *Disgusting*, we said, *Oh my god, as if*, we said, but we were electrified by the thought of having a body worth wanting.

On The Zipper, bodies belted and bound, we promised when it happened we'd share every detail. When it happened, we didn't, of course, because what happened wasn't anything we'd ever tell anyone.

Long after the ride, its motion kept us wobbly. The carnies spat chaw as we walked by, wiped what was left on the backs of their hands, promised again they had just what we needed. Our stomachs lurched at the thought, so we devoured elephant ears curly fries, and corndogs so scorching we had to sacrifice our throats to save our tongues.

ANYTHING BUT GHOST

There are ghosts everywhere:
the smudge of dark in my rear-view
mirror, the dime-sized blood-bullet
in my morning yolk, remote-control
car stalled on the stairs,
but you're not one of them.

You are gone, but anything but ghost.
Lilacs burst like tiny white grenades,
and there you are. Sparrows smother
the morning with their song, there you
are. You are neither flower nor bird,
but when has one thing ever not been
another.

I've tried to thousand you, tuck tiny
parts of you in places I won't notice,
the delicate, pale skin of my sole,
the fold of the ear one forgets to clean,
but you are stubborn. You smolder.
You clench my every movement,
ground what I want to sky,
shallow what I want drowned.

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