CORE

poems

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Floors and Fittings

This is the house built on flat of scrap white pine and sycamore—family, floored with chisel, chainsaw, hammer. They faced the flat of walls, lime plastered and plugged of breath by sand and water too wet to bet the mortgage on. This is the house built on sweat of potsherd women whole as wood thinnings, and yet they rolled the bones of great, grand and mother, fashioned tongues as door with chisel, chainsaw, hammer—they bet the rent on love-lack, and lack of love is what their whetstone bent into its fittings, then strawed to broom they jumped from heart to floor. This is the house built with muddied-good intentions dried to vow stopped breath and yet, and yet, they bet with chisel, chainsaw, hammer.

So send a postcard just to the west of I do and yes and there will be the house built with chisel, chainsaw, and hammer.
Communion

Saturday morning sun streaks through stained glass, slanting
gold across red carpet, as if God gathered up his glory and threw
it clean through the milky way to split this steel gray morning. We
have already been to the furnace. Stirred coals until they coughed
like a young boy’s lungs after a puff on his first cigarette while we waited
for the church’s coffee colored walls to warm. Although it’s nothing new to
us, this once monthly ritual of pouring grape juice into glasses, placing glasses
into round, silver trays; I round the corner of the pew and pause, preparing to meet
God. At the altar, we place silver trays piled with small glass cups cupping the
blood of Christ. Sit them on the wooden altar. Then whisk starched white sheets across
so quickly, that the flap of fabric catches air and for a moment, flies.
Miracle

For a moment, I am flight. She is right. My slip of stream gleams gold instead of smoke.

And she is also right to sight me in the shined sweep of sunlight, instead of in the scratch and spill of ink.

They are choking her with Sunday stories— they are splintering me into thorn and nail and rails of wood.

When she rounds this corner I could turn her wine back to water, undo the fiction that makes her totter. Instead, I breathe in her belief and exhale fabric into wings.
Story Tell Me

that cellophaned tenets turn to heartwood. Story, sell me that this body
is a trunk, sunk deep into its own soil. Convince
my fingerprinted memory that when roots coil skin
that it isn’t the paradoxed end of living. Only
the lip of hope that births bleak into a beginning rinsed
of snake and apple and eve-figged sin.

Story, tell her that love is a mouth, bell shaped and coward-quiet
grиюtпg god into truth—loose as lightning
flying into sunlight. Story, whisper wildly
that tonight love is a verse that eviscerates silence—
a fairytale where the beanstalk is really a tree that rises
in its rooting—right now in her back yard-deep and bark-skin winding.
Story, spell her a tale of tears turned to taproot grown from unbinding—
salted seeds split from the tip of her tongue, growing
defiant.
Clean

I live in my mother’s back yard. In a house as yellow as summer lemons and just as sour beyond the pith inside. Two sons and three daughters have fallen from between my legs like water. I am quick as the click of high heels on nighttime pavement and have mimicked my mother’s week-long work in white women’s kitchens. But, I have refused the rough knees knocked out on the rub of linoleum and wood by bending low when they came in to see me shine their floors.

I never got down on my knees for white folks or God either.
Birth

She says I fell from between her legs like water,
but I know I was no river. I wasn’t rushing in to life
because I’ve never rushed into anything.

I know instead, that I trickled creek water slow,
threading length of birth canal to daylight. Feet
first probably, to measure the give and take of ground.

And all the while I wound, I was testing her pace since all her
life she sounded all grace and click and tick-tick movement
while I sounded shuffle and seep and drip-drop stream.
Afterbirth

:mother

I saw her as sheath of bat wing. At 3 or 5 of 4 or maybe 2 she was transparent and still, until the singing sling of Orion’s belt blew her away from this, our second skin.

I could see her lift at the corner of my eye and knew she wanted to bring me in. Wanted to fold me in the flap of her hurt-shaped hollow, so

:daughter

I bent my boneless sorrow into bow string, forged my steel-tipped ache into the break where arrow meets sin. I wanted to shape my heart-skin to be the quiver she bears me in.

I wanted her to meet me again—wanted her to greet me as bat wing or know me as the singing sling of Orion’s belt.
Supper

Light streaks across black sky tonight like colored ribbons blown straight by wind. The air’s so still, seems earth forgot to breathe, again.

I set down the bowl of snap beans I am splitting for tomorrow’s supper on the wooden porch slats and watch the night shape your saunter to the bottom step.

You are straight and healing as milkweed.

Come to New York with me, you say. I hear a black man can dig out more of a life in those wide streets than he can in these dark Ohio valley coal mines.

Your words mount the steps my father built as you wear a grin so contagious that it curves from the corners of your cheeks like creek water. You promise—

We could leave tomorrow.

I am sitting stiff backed on a rough-hewn rocker. My baby’s cries slip through the screen door and blow the wind right out of me. I watch moon light fall to earth like ashes from the roof of a burning house. I am black. A woman. Aged twenty-five. Mother of three. Widowed.

The night air still holds stiff as silence.

The fingers of my right hand stroke the slip of bean still folded in its palm. I snap one stringed edge, the other, then my thumb and forefinger split the bean swiftly in two. I have always loved the beans that grow out back beyond the buckeye trees. Just now I know, you will pack one small bag tonight, full of blue trousers and white shirts.
Tomorrow, I will bake ham for me to eat with these green beans for supper.
Leave

We could leave tomorrow. Could slip off alley dust like the slate blue work shirt I skin off mid-threshold every night.

Baby, if you are a sassafras tree in flower—
I am dandelion all gone to seed. Here, all the life gets blown out of me.
Which Stars? a braided aubade

:she

Since the rising points of stars sit sure, there’s no need to right ourselves on morning. This slightly southern moon albumins the tips of grass, egg white—when I was young, I used to pinch the belly of a firefly, lay its light on my marriage finger then let it trail my linger into midnight. Now, the only breath that feeds me is stirred to wind by the shelled song of cicadas.

:he

Baby, each day our risings and settings could be due east or south of this nowhere. Honey, instead of being pulled by tide, we could make our own light—could site ourselves in the spark of train to track. You got to know; I can’t go back to young. Cause then all I wanted was to run straight through night to morning.
Shutter

When my granddaughters strain to snap
my picture, I turn my head away so
suddenly that the slap of it shapes
their smiles into small, black o’s.

There was a time, that hours saw me
stop in mirrors to see my reflection,
that mornings saw me slice a perfect
charcoal c under each eye, then slowly
trace my smile red. There was a time
when my legs were thick with possibility,
that I would stop along roadsides to pick
cattails and search for my silhouette in sunlight.

This is not the first time I have refused
to see myself. There was a time before
marriage to a man whose fingers held the neck
of a whiskey bottle with more gentleness than when
they gripped my own throat, a time before six boys
were born out of me, only to be made in their father’s
image, a time before cushions cradled the familiar
curve of bodies, my husband’s at the center of our bed
and mine on the couch that I mark as the first time,
when I, mirror less, veiled my face in white lace, then
closed the door to my father’s house and opened
it to my husband’s without looking.
it wasn’t a whisky bottle’s neck i nuzzled.

it was the stiff slick of a peony. just add this
to the things she got bottle-necked between
what I shoulda been and could never be. She

was word-raised while i grazed on auto grease
and miner’s dust. she bent abc’s into some kinda
damn verse— so yeah, i buried xyz’s in her throat.
see, i was mechanic and she was engine—all piston

and ring. and when i oiled her—
bone and breath,
boy could she sing.
Origin Story: a braided triolet

It was always the whiskey bottle’s neck.
The fact that father’s fingers figure eighted mother’s
adam’s apple, pushed “i do” from these lips liquid as breath.
It was always the whiskey bottle’s neck.
I know you also got birthed from death.
I know your daddy grabbed the throat of your mother.
It was always the whiskey bottle’s neck—
the fact that daddy’s fingers figure-eighted mother’s.

how you know my nicotine and lovers
ain’t fruit from the family tree i watched my daddy plant?
how you know i don’t wanna be more than the fists of my father
how you know my nicotine and my lovers
ain’t the whiskey-wet haint that hovers
in my sons whose madness cuffs their kid’s hands?
how you know my nicotine and lovers
ain’t the fruit from the family trees I watched my daddy’s plant?

how you know?
We can’t.
Hiring

They lined us up daily. 10 or more men outside the supervisor’s office window.

Some of us, standing straight as whitewashed fence posts, others as solid as the dark space between rungs. All of us stiffing our spines with the hope we’d be hired, while we were measured day after day by a yard stick that didn’t exist. A line of 10 men whose legs turned into question marks were pulled to paychecks or pushed further to poverty by the point of the supervisor’s finger. He could tinker with our futures in an Ohio Valley where it was either steel or coal that put food on tables. We couldn’t name the criteria, so he kept white men and their children seeing sunlight while the few black men who made the cut, bent themselves in half below ground. Once we got in, we were in it. 300 feet deep at least and up to our shins in water and rock dust with just enough to depend on us above ground to keep us down under.
Closing

For years, the rumors didn’t scare me. I knew there was still 50 or 60 years of raw material to haul out that could fuel me from age 21 to pension. Besides, we had struck before and survived. Once, we miners fed our families 109 days on fish and deer.

But this was different. It was devastating. I had worked coal seams so steady that they stretched back to our father’s and their father’s before them. Most of us went underground so young that it felt like we had exchanged graduation caps for hard hats to work a job that was supposed to be as stable as the bolts we used to steady the tons-heavy coal ceilings with. See, I had spent twenty years in shafts as short as my ten year old daughter where I learned to go in safe. Coveralls, steel-reinforced boots, hard hat, light. Stayed alert while my body measured time in the constant chew, haul, bolt, scoop, chew, haul, bolt, scoop of the system. Had lunched and hunched in a place where everyday it was completely life or death. So it was impossible to believe that I would ever need to reinvent myself. Hard to conceive that coming out could be what killed me. I was a coal miner. Could see in light as thin as a pencil line but now, with Y&O’s doors closing, I couldn’t see my future. But I searched anyway. Found an opening 50 miles from home and applied. Felt a high school education wouldn’t make me one of the 87 hired for a factory job. With 10,000 applicants whose resumes were weighty while mine was light as coal dust, I knew I would have to trust God. So, five months and no call found me steadying myself on scripture. Mining bible page by page like I was mining pillar to post, prayer picking up pieces of my spirit like loose coal. But God’s promise pushed me six months from last unemployment check to plenty.
Something

There is nothing here. Honest. Your Ohio Valley is silent and choking; coal dust caked on a nineteen year-old miner’s lungs. It buries people.

Turns spirit to cinder and some of ’em don’t see it. Buries me too, but all I can do is breathe it in, between I married you and again.

The first time, I was twenty-something. A divorced mother. You were twenty-something, Widowed. Needing a mother for your daughters. We both were there. Twisting our twenties like turnpikes into adulthood.

We were not good, together. Conversations that should have been easy, caught in the clink of glass on glass until we found ourselves whiskey-wrought and fighting. I lulled myself with cigarettes. That slow burn was something I could count on.

And you? You found your forgetting flecked in the fins of fish. Hooked them mid-swim in a boat big enough for one bucket and one body, only.

And me? I still keep a little money stashed so that wherever and whenever I reach, I have just enough to get away.
Together

Some days I am a boat, big enough for one bucket and one body only. My skin, the thin that sails through silted memories that bank at my soul’s edge.

Those days, I paddle to the strip mine’s center—drop anchor. Breathe. Then feel the catch and slide of insides settling as I thread bait through crook of hook. I drop line. Look life into the hole that swallows. Some nights we face each other—faces fringed with the flesh of fist-heavy fathers and the skin of mothers stiff as the slick of punching bags. Our eyes and mouths—the picture perfect film of water.

Those nights, air ceases to exist. Those nights I dream of breathing. Those nights my ears become the gulping gills of fish.
The smallmouth spirals its scales toward sun; my hook exposed. Tail breaks silence’s surface. I tug, life’s fight exposed.

There are rocks I want to hook from strip mine’s bed. Polish pieces into flecked stars; set them in your ears, exposed.

But polish-cloth is fingers flexed to unclog float-coal. And this dust, raked from rock stops our blast. These years, exposed.

Water, penny-colored replicates this memory: Your ring-box mouth you closed, reappears. All hurt exposed.

You say my back’s a boatbed you can’t curve your spine to. My back’s planking’s plumbed to your vertebral fears, exposed.

I am a boat, bow-bent with burdens newly exposed.

Nights, I don’t face you; turn body to dream unexposed.
I hold breath to halt love’s surfacing. Keep hope unexposed

There is rock I want to split from strip mine’s bed. Fracture “now” from “maybe”; hide in cupboard corners, unexposed.

This drill bit is teeth that crack from tongue’s private puncture. This hope is water slowed by oiled thickeners unexposed.

Nights, I gill water’s oxygen to blood
Scale lips to fit your lungs. Leave loving years unexposed.

Days, I surface sore from shape-shifting feet into fins Slip thin boned scales from eyelids that keep fears unexposed

My cheek first breaks water, wields your silver hook—exposed.
testimony

*the found poems in this section are adapted from two of the 300 pages of oral histories of Latino/as and African Americans in Saginaw, Michigan collected and compiled by Dr. Michelle S. Johnson in a project called Community Spaces of the Industrious.
and I was the middle—Found Poem #1 A.R.9-9-99

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born?

Starkville, Mississippi.

Mother? Father?

Yes. father farmer. just for himself. enough to support his family of nine children.

eight brothers and sisters?

Yes.

Where did you fall? Oldest, youngest, middle?

Exactly.

Middle.

It was, it was nine of us and I was the middle child. It was two boys older than me, two boys younger than me, two girls older than me and two girls younger than me.

So when you said exactly . . .

Yes.
farming? what kind of

small scale just to support his family

yes.
cotton, corn hay . . . we raised
peanuts,
sweet potatoes Sugar cane molasses hogs and my mother

raised a lot of chickens and let’s see. milk cows sell the milk.
that’s how
he would come by a little money And then the
15th and 1st
they would pay him for the milk

twice a month.
Did he own his land?
How much land was he working?
100 acres
land. And some of it was pasture
and some of it was hay
and some he farmed
and some was
wood or timber, where the trees grow
once in awhile
buy the trees cut them down.
Son of A—Found Poem # 4 A.R.9-9-99

_____________________________________________________

How did your father acquire the 100 acres?

Okay that’s a story too. During slavery time you know slave master, some kind enough to will property to the slaves when they die some slaves were like children and they would will . . . and

so my fathers’ grandfather a child of the slave master.
Do you remember *his name*?

My fathers’ grandfather?

*Um hum.*

Jerry Tait.

Jerry Tait.

a little boy, he was small when the slaves was freed he received

100 acres he inherit this land you see.

And was divided between the children.

*Between the nine?*

Between the nine
I’ve Never Been—Found Poem # 6 A.R.9-9-99

So how old were you when you left Mississippi?
23 years old I’m thinking.

So what was it like in Starkville when you left?
Segregated bad, real bad. And I was...

I had to leave because white people crazy
when you were man enough to say
no to them no to them no to them no
you know. And so I’ve never been one
to buckle to nobody, I’ve never been

I’ve never been.
So you got a job at Malleable in 1949?
Malleable yes.
what was it like Malleable
1949?
Real bad.

What kind of work were you doing?
Real bad, hook out man
real bad
they call it the hot line a big conveyor belt
brought iron out of the foundry, had a long line heavy containers
they loaded iron in the foundry.

Was it hot iron?
Yes
hot iron pulled iron set iron shook a
shake out iron
loaded conveyor corner belt dump it on this line guys
that would knock the … off place behind you hook
off with
these iron hooks, hook the iron off put it over behind
your supervisor constantly telling you, you taking
off as much iron as you can take off now, you tell you
another job be coming in say well I’ll put it over here
you’re already getting as much as you can get but they could
come in and if you don’t do it they send you home.
When They Sent Me Home

Started as hook out man. Had to catch solar hot iron flares mid-spin on conveyor belts; pile it accordin’ to job.

It was hard. Hard. Hard. Me takin’ off much iron as I
could. Heat makin’ me want to take my own skin off.

But knowin’ that South to North in ’49 made my wallet
handkerchief thin, forced me to keep the foreman

behind me makin’ sure my hookin’ hand could catch each
job. Put it in its proper place so I wouldn’t lose my place

when they sent me home. And they sent me home, plenty.
’Cause I couldn’t see the justice in that job or any. White

men standin’ like picket fence line with clipboards and ties
while black men stooped, shovlin’ coal dust or soot-brushed

and burnin.’ 15 years of workin’ that kind of shift had me ready
for shiftin’ to somethin.’ While 10 more saw me grind, mill and

press; I was all the while stretchin’ spirit from cinder so that after
a fair day’s work, people would know I wasn’t no workin’ boy.

I worked the big wigs like I worked the line. Fixed what needed
fixin’— took off only what was mine and felt the bill-fold in my
pocket, ’cause it was the rock iron that steadied me.
On This Hot Line—Found Poem # 8 A.R.9-9-99

Let me ask one more question, on this hot line was it mostly black folks and Latinos or?
Yes, yes, yes,
It was mostly blacks and Mexicans you know.
Just mostly blacks you see you see.
when you on the line and the line break down or something
they always had some little dirty

job that they wanted you to do always.
And do some little dirty detail whenever they would
come get me for the detail, some little nasty
detail, then I would ask them how you choose me
how you come by me.

because I’m black.
Oh no, no no.
You getting me? No, no, no. I
say you getting me because I’m the youngest man?

So he couldn’t give me no justification for getting me so I
tell him get another man see
because I’m not the youngest man, I know I’m not
the youngest man, I’m older than the white boy over there,
I’m older than these boys over here, I’m older than these over here,
now how you choose me see.
So

that’s

the

way

I

would fight them . So I would

fight.

did

until I came out for 25 years.

And I came out in 1975.
Foreman’s Visit

It’s not the last time he’ll pocket his hand to pat my shine. He strokes my skin, eager like he’s makin’ sho I’m still there in the same secret way his Saturday woman’s fingers feel for the familiar rough of linen folded line-fine as chisel edge in my money pocket.

I have been rocked by his up and down of hip since he started standin’ the line and know that when he holds my sweat stained skin, he is really holdin’ his anger. See, I know I am the armor that keeps him from takin’ off his own skin.
Where I would like to start. Do you remember your full name, your date born?
Johnny Fifer that’s F-i-f-e-r. born?
Mississippi. Canton. born?
3-27-41. born?
Do you remember it well?
Yeah, I remember. It was rough; we sharecroppers lived—passed.
Just the way it was back then. Raised corn, cotton, beans, sweet potatoes, the whoschlak.
You name it, we raised it—raised a complete crop.

Who owned the land?
John Witt—he had land as far as the eye could see.

That your family worked?
No—we shared so much. Each family had so much on this plantation. I would say he had
at least 10, 15 families.

Really?
Yeah.

All black?
Mm

hm.
So how many acres your family work?

just the three of us. That’s my grandmother—

Your grandmother you and— my first cousin. we

30 bails of cotton a year the farm outside Canton?

It was outside of Canton, it was Madison County, 20 miles from town. daughters would come home to visit. grandmother four daughters and one son.

Everybody living now? just one left. still living.

What year did your grandmother die? Oh God— I’ll have to get back to condense it. they all came home. after we buried my grandmother. got our packing we had crops and stuff you know we had to let
Mr. John know, 

well he knew what was going on. 

and I 

didn't want to leave 

I 

had been with him all my life and that's 

the only one 

I did know. 

I was going to Saginaw, my mother was over 

[t]here.
So how long had your mom been here Saginaw?

My mother, I don’t know exactly how long. Yes I do

Because [mother] she met him and they

[husband] hiring at the Malleable Iron so he came over got hired the same day

ended that’s how she ended up over here.
So then you came to Saginaw?

1950 Yeah.

So what was that like?

come from living out on a farm
[to] basketball?

I played we played summer league
Hoyt Park and I ice skated
I was going to play but had the job, I needed money, my mother couldn’t, you know, things that I wanted better clothes stuff like that so

I said well I was able so when I got out of school I just went straight to the cleaners and started working there, then I worked till they closed until Marcella got pregnant, after she got pregnant with my daughter

then I had to drop out of school the little job that I had it wasn’t enough— then I had the responsibility.
the plant.

Mr. Foley

I went to Mr. Foley and he hired me at the Malleable.
work was, oh God work was hard at the Malleable.

What were you doing out there? Dubberman.

what's that?
That's the hardest, that's lifting molds,

I mean 60, 70

How long? lift them up off the belt?

How long? Lift it from the mold machine to the belt.

About 8 hours. Or 9, 10. whatever they working you do.

Was hot? Wasn't it?

Hot, hot, hot, I mean red hot. That's why I say you had to have a purpose or family or something in order to stay. You had to know what work were or something you know. You couldn’t just go in there and I got a job. You had to have something to think about that makes you do this for 8 or 9 or 10 hours. But soon as you got home, Hands swoll, take some Epsom Salt, Mama ... and
alcohol and rub them down.

How long? So you would

lift them

till I got ready to retire.
Purpose

You had to have something to think about made you able to be duberman or shake out at the Malleable. 8, 9, 10 hours of crackin’ cast from sand or pouring 5000 tons of melted metal a day while sweat swilled slick into iron and flicked like fireworks on concrete.

There was no freedom in this. Black men goin’ in, skin all shades of Saginaw soil, then coming out darker than the coal that heated the foundry. See, I had to find me a purpose. Somethin’ to keep me shiftin’ mold to belt so that every second felt light as liftin’ bread to my daughter’s mouth with my fingertips.
she had got in the shop there.

*Now*  

*what was she doing*  

*in*  

*the plant?*

*I don’t know. I never did.*  

*So you don’t know what kind of work she was doing?*


*But I know they working a lot of oily stuff.*

*A lot?*

*Yeah cuz when she got home she smelled like oil.*
So she was on the line?

Yeah.
Oil

There was no freedom in this. True, black men went in. But black women shed dresses for denim—also, stood the line. Some shook soot from strands of hair. I scraped oil from mine. There are lines we’ve all walked. Some thin and straight as pencil lines. Some dark and slued crude-thick. We walked both.

Graphite light in years—we laid the first scratch together. Backs arched passion-straight on silver seats in the back of a ’56 Pontiac Starchief. The second, we scrawled grief-bent. My belly baby-full and yours binge-heavy on obligation. Then, we crossed them.

You, when you found your music mingled with the growl and hum of motorcycle engines. And me—when my skin breathed blow-oil sour in the space perfume should have been.
we would be stretched as far as the eye could see so we
would cut off hit M-13 to Saginaw. Big Buck and
them keep straight up go under the underpass,
that’s some beautiful noise, you hear
Harleys.

By the time we get home bugs on the windshield,
eyeglasses it’s 3:00 or 4:00 in morning
and it’s like music to your ears. I tell you
50, 75, 100 bikes coming down. I mean ya’ll rolling, 95 miles an
hour heading home
that was a beautiful sound. And you tooling on.

Turn that hog on let it rock, his lady, his
sold my bike. Sometimes I hate that I
So did your wife ever go?

Oh no, no, no. She couldn’t stand.

Those, those, those . . . in fact

my wife never did

get on the motorcycle

and she didn’t

like that either. She said “no way in life I’m getting on that two-wheeler.”

Now did you want her to at first?

yeah. By that time you know we just . . . we wasn’t . . . maybe when we first got together she probably would have but by that time
I should have breathed you in. Should have flicked convention from my mind, but the oil slicked pencil line image of you rockin’ sand from molds of iron thick as your thighs after your thighs rocked me, melted all this man so deep into misery that these fingertips forgot the trace of your breast as you breathed sleep deep after lovemaking.

Forgot you ever breathed “mmm, Johnny. My man” into this curve of neck. Forgot those yearning years sailed yawl-young in a line. Forgot those sweat slick moments you were mine. Then, I melted into you, my thin-shouldered Marcella. What I wanted was you, virgin thick Cella to always belly up behind, trace your lace thin fingers along this broad, thick back. Girl, did you have to haul and hoist like that? Did you have to? Did you forget I breathed next to you? Marcella, you had to? You could’a rubbed fingers raw and melted our poverty in the sterile smell of bleach and soapsuds, could’a been black and women and flicked misery from our mouths while fitting white folks socks on twine twisted and hung into line. But you flicked away my soul fist-handed instead of pulling me in with your fingertips.

John, you used to be Johnny. But my Johnny got lost between the thumb and fore of fingertips pressed into filter thick lips then crushed into the rough of cement as we blew, smoke curved into line. But, what’s real had slipped from my geography long before ingot got breathed into steel. Long before this brow bled sweat-red into bandanna and men flicked my femininity into flecks of ore. I melted—melted dreams into 12 days on 12 days off—melted fingertips into molten metal. The job flicked identity from fingerprints. Still, I was hope thick that we still breathed the huh-huhhhhh breath of first kiss. I still sauntered the line between bills and everything is possible. But responsibility’s wrinkle already etched a line between us. I mirrored your manhood across cast iron molds, melted your memory of the first time we breathed together. Melted the melody of your fingertips the first time you touched the thick between my thighs. My soft and sway and switch flicked.

John, while I struggled to dream without any pieces of good truth to mix up hope with, you flicked the me still wanting to be your song-drink, your long drink, your talking drum into the thick of failure. Cella, we touched with bodies bruised by surviving instead of tendering our sores with our fingertips.

:John
:Marcella
:they
What I Want You to See

Birds crash at the feeder, drop
beaked seeds like moments.
Every moment distils into this:

The gardener my son imagined he was. The cosmo
seed he planted but forgot to crack first. The seed
of the son I imagined buried in the clay-cracked
soil of my womb. The robin-egged blue of the room
that seeded my never imagining a son who would
never plant a garden and the garden that would never
be fed by the wet wheel of the mill in the step mother’s
place that became the wipe of the drop on the back
of the hand of the grandfather who tendered the petal
soft skin of his wife like the gardener my never-son
imagined himself to be. Look.
This is what I want you to see:

The grandmother, never flower frail.
The grandfather, whiskey-wet handed.
The son, never planted.

The seed—
broken but never blooming.
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