

Sarah Lilius

Always the Ocean

Father, I feel your death rising in my throat like a cold tide of salty water.

Mother takes your clothes to Goodwill to be sorted and sold to people who did not know you. She washed those clothes over and over. The machine knows them so intimately. You shuffled around in them. You do not need them, you are ash.

I walk into the diner and “Landslide” plays. Just weeks after your death, I remembered how we danced to this song. I was the young bride. We would never dance together again.

I’m tired of this bittersweet entity chasing me down like a boulder. I’m looking for stones, in my heart, my mouth.

That ocean with her constant nothing. There’s no landmark of that pulsing. Just the living and dead thousands of miles under. The broken shells under my feet are gifts the Pacific gives. I collect them for no other reason than to know I was there.

We see who can be the saddest in hiding. And then in therapy we cover our mouths and we close our eyes tight. The man watches and reassures in such delicate lies. His mouth is moving. His mouth is moving.

Within

*If we have not found heaven within,
it is a certainty we will not find it without.*
-Henry Miller

I was a tragic wind the day my father died.

Penetrating whistles propel
Sunday garbage into flight.
The broken way we stare through
old windows before a storm,
amazed by how night can take the day
then stunned by how day can recover,
return with a childish light—
we feel relief.

Among the pews
we melt into a common dread.
The oldest lie
does not slap or pinch
but leaves us fluffing our wings,
waxing our chariots.

My feet will walk the pavement for miles
if a garden, endless and fertile,
is within these days' reach.

A dead bird,
gray, stiff,
borders where concrete meets earth.
Countless children ride past
the eager solitude,
the flightless
summons.

Within:

a mangled desire
inflated with hope,
a cauldron of hot,
hot fear.

We spin into
each other to find the one
who is not spinning. The one
who is solid within

shall be fearless
without.

Thirst

~for Virginia Woolf

Wait for the approach.

The barren stroll—
you search the
waterside for words, words.

The storyline lies patient
among stones.

Word by word, you drop
the end—smooth
into your pockets, full.

This story will be told,
word by word—wet death,
they will find the weakness
in your mind.

But your lungs
fight and yearn,
the words

usher you slow to the
bottom, a sullen cliché—
you return to the mother

heavy and fed—
the approach, the hunger,
the thirst—

a strange
immortality.
You control

the way the story
ends.