

Every Song a Sigh

My family faced each Thanksgiving with something like hope, a residual reenactment we clung to. All of it handily snookered by my sister's demons.

There was turkey—all the smells you smell at your table were served at ours, sweet corn, candied yams, buttery biscuits, accusations.

We'd bow our heads for the blessing, Daddy reminding us we were built to love. Mama would shout *amen*, my sister would snort, make fun of Jesus. Mama cried.

Outside the sky stretched and yawned, I imagined myself a songbird, dips and swirls, a clear rippled coolness of breeze.

The Dogwoods at Night

You got to see this, my husband spouts, fresh in
from tilling the fields, scented in soil and
diesel fuel from the tractor, face lit up like a
toddler straddling a pony.

It's dark, I'm in my pajamas,
freshly scrubbed, feet bare.
Grab your shoes, he says, barn-
bound to fire up the ATV.

Trainers laced, wrapped in a jacket,
I climb in beside him, the Teryx
idling full tilt, like it, too, can hardly
wait to see the spectacle that has
my earthbound man star-eyed.
Off we ride to the lower pasture,
headlights blazing.

When we get there, he doesn't say a
word, doesn't need to. The high
beams refract off clusters of pearly
petals, chandeliers, neon-lit,
psychedelic. Branches arched, we
cruise beneath cathedral ceilings in
low gear, mouths flung open,
gasping up wonder by the lung full.

When we finally return to the house,
shimmery-glazed and chilly, he hugs
me so tight, I smell the sweat, the oily
rags, the hammer, nails, screwdrivers
of him, my heart pounding out
symphonies and sonnets.

Our Grandmother

twisted silver-streaked strands into a knot,
pinned at the tip of her crown, draped her
bird bones in crossback aprons cut from
calico, sewn on a pump pedal Singer, bought
brand new just after the war,

baked flakey scratch biscuits from
White Lily flour, spoonfuls of lard,
a pinch of salt and sass, danced the
flatfoot clog around an old wringer
washer, employed on Mondays
without fail,

wielded a scythe and hoe good as any
man, grew cabbages big as
watermelons, drew us maps, where we
came from, patchworks of bloodroot,
furled fierce along the face of the
Appalachians,

orphaned us, laid out under a pine
branch blanket, a rough-chiseled
stone. Redbuds wept purple
pearls, the fields so bare they grew
voices.

Spring in the Hollow

Beryl blue sky, sun
in our eyes,

creek nuzzles stone.
Breeze stirs, reminds us

this ground we tramp,
root labyrinth,

rising and setting inside our shoes,
is remedy—electric

with violets, dandelion and fern,
a single buzzing bee.

Any flaw our bodies carry
from *otherwhere*

disappears—
at waterfall,

at ravine edge, inside the
unstoppable petal storm.