Surface Fish

I wore it, that overcoat until the holes dressed inside of me. It was late January, the surface fish weren’t dead yet, they passed in ice cubes around the rim of the sidewalk.

*Your coat isn’t soft anymore.* But still you nuzzled cold sweat, still you desired.

We ate pineapples by the edge of the lake, your mother said they were good for us and I believed her because she was a nice woman with river-dusted eyes (I saw fish in them, they wanted out, they needed)

*A different kind of death.* I guess I wasn’t ready to fling the coat into the river, but you kept telling me it smelled like old Hemmingway books your mother kept laminated in the back room. I saw eyes glazed outward, skin that would get caught by the fence post, more holes and more places to drown—*I don’t think this is going to work out anymore*—and I admit I miss you quite often, all the holes in your skin.

Floors

My neighbor talks about her body that broke her mother’s oaken step stool when she was fourteen years old, and she had to wall herself in good. I build floors, I want to tell her—this woman with hand towels hanging crooked in the kitchen, the pumpkin seeds on them not eaten.

I imagine my wife having a panic attack. There is a slanted frame below the Aster novi-belgii border. “My wife was a florist,” I tell her, and the frame
is slanted—the Great Pyrenees is slanted.

“Oh… you have a wife?” she’s disappointed because I took a bite
of her pumpkin pie and enjoyed it. I can tell
that wall is still there in her eyes caught off balance, but I guess it would
be there for anyone. My wife would sometimes scream into my lips
but avoid the eyes, or else.

I’m guessing she doesn’t know
about the ash wood floors I crawl under to get nearer
to the place where souls are kept clean.
I don’t know who a soul is now and I don’t want to know if she leaves
her kitchen towels crooked. The neighbor has copper wired hair, olive eyes just
like her but she’s not. “My wife is waiting for me at home,” I tell her.

A Branch in the Tundra

God is a vein in the body, perhaps the bluest one or
at least that’s what Mother
made it out to be, but that girl told me she was impractical
the first time she kissed me beneath the Sycamore,
and those peppermint-flavored lips have been on
my mind, what they said and it has been there like
a blue of its own, “you are just a branch in the tundra.”
I didn’t ask what she meant because I liked her
that wild. Sometimes I imagine
her hatchback airborne on State Route 51,
curving and blood recoiling in the body afraid, so afraid
to leave a soul and all I can
think about is those iced lips and how awful she was at
driving, and it could happen now. “There
are things that will get to you,” she said, and I had a feeling it was
that look in God’s eyes when he saw Eve shifting her breasts,
the skin caught in her teeth so faint and how could he
wake the morning after that? It’s like catching my Mother, eye-tied
to the table and she’s speaking softly, butter dripping
through the creases of oak and she calls it beautiful like her son’s body erect in the soil. I need to tell her she’s wrong but she’s the blue center. I am just a branch in the Tundra.

Branches in the Tundra

Somehow, I think he always knew from the way she teased the grape vines between her pearl teeth.

He counted the olive irises—
one, two—slithering into the back of his throat.
He choked when he saw her twiddling the fruit between her bare breasts.

He wanted a taste from the Tree of death, to take her away, lay her curving back against the sheets of ice.

“I think my name is Adam,” he said and took a bite to be with her.

1.
I can see you sleeping in the trees, Mother, seeds dripping from your navel to God in the dirt. I am not Eve this time, because you are Eve this time, and God is a branch smoking a pipe, tells you that you’re stuck with who are you,
and be home by five for dinner
or else you’re grounded.
Maybe worse if he finds the belt
that you hid in the closet Saturday night.
I hope he doesn’t
find the belt.
Mom,
please don’t eat the apple.
Didn’t anyone ever tell you
there are no trees in the tundra?

2.
I promise
I wasn’t the one who laid
the apple
on my tongue.
She had taken my arms; I had to
slither (she made me do it, she made me) and I can’t help but wonder
did God ever
love the snakeskin on her back, the empty
in her eyes?

3.
*Knock knock*, she said,
and God was there. *My body is a branch*, I told her, and
ice flowed over the valleys to find who else was inside. The orange trees
were dead, apples curving more beautifully to fit skin
over mine, and all the while I thought, *God has to know.*

4.
God, when I die,
will I go to heaven?
Eve, when I go to heaven,
will I die?
5.
I could see the apple in your eye, between your breasts
that Adam fished from the brushwood.
For just a second, Mother,
I was your father’s hands around your throat.
This is why my daughter will loathe me
and this is why
Eve sleeps in the trees to hide from God’s belt
and the way he arcs her over his knee.

6.
It was in the frost I saw you eat the apple, God.
You didn’t have to listen to yourself slither
across Mother’s eyelids, you didn’t
have to turn them inside-out (it doesn’t make a
soul okay, to lose it in red skin) but

I promise if you let me be God this time,
I will give you all the apples
you need.

Apples in the River

Her (my) body was lost in the river
beyond the banks; apples (the green ones) floated in
her hands (her seven hands).
The current didn’t last long, it didn’t pull apart her mouth like
it should’ve, like it used to. “Do you think the skies are always blue?”
she said, “do you think it will be this way forever?” The skin
was in her (my) teeth (the green skin).
Lungs always folding inward: like the story my mastiff told me
before he stopped breathing; he’s in the grass now (green), homeless in
some river. She was like my mastiff—brown gentle eyes (the serpents’).
The apples in her backyard didn’t last forever, they didn’t make it through
the winter when she was freezing beneath the water, cool blue curls
as if it would be that way forever. As if she (I) hadn’t made
out with the neighbor behind the apple tree when
I (she) was looking (seven times).

Dear Chrysanthemum,

That is what I call you because I know you see them when your eyes glaze over, and did you
happen to see me in the window? Don’t try to tell me the orange ones aren’t your favorite—
how lovely they are when they’re in your eyes; you water them until the can begs for a break,
and it’s that type of faultlessness that walks your trembling hands through the door every
morning to see a sun that lives behind trees. Is that all you do, I wonder, water away the
different colors and smells until they are the bed you sleep in every night, alone and writing
letters that haven’t made any words yet. The perfect N stands for how you feel when your
daughter tells her daughters NO—they can’t come visit Chrysanthemum, the woman with
her sweats on backwards, an empty mailbox she left her heart in. And I’d love to come
apologize for nothing I did, but I still feel this way when I see those simple eyes—the white
chrysanthemum curling inward to see again, the petals like fresh skin upon that hand, and I
can see you’re waiting still. I watched the nurse take you back inside for toast and cranberry
juice. You didn’t get to finish watering the orange ones and I know just how you feel. I
know.

Wool

There is a piece of wool in her hair and she has
no idea. It’s grave really, if you think about it. You begin to
wonder “what if I had a piece of wool in my hair?” Maybe something worse.
My mother used to look me in the eyes every night, flicking bible
verses from her tongue to catch them on mine. I don’t remember
a damn word but she did tell me God was inside of me.
Her eyes were opaque slits, a type of black that curled up beside you,
scraped within your ear the sound of clovers growing, but where is the fourth—where is the fourth leaf in the pile of leaves? And I can’t make it up, not like she could if I let her inside. What if God is in my hair? He’s sleeping, he’s curving, he has all the goddamn clovers wrapped around his fingers. And do they have four? Mother would say she knew…it’s in the bible, it’s in the verses wrapped around those eyelids. I won’t tell her about the wool, I won’t.