

Remnant

a chapbook

by Lauren Sylvia Foster

Parents

I watched a Malcolm Gladwell interview the other day and he said the biggest indicator of success is rich parents. No hesitation. I'm trying to remember what it's like to have parents. I'm the parent now, the teacher, the person who'd occasionally get called mom in a kindergarten classroom. I can still smell preschool—well-trodden carpet and apple juice. I said “people around our age” to an undergrad class today. Long pause. Cusp. Perjury. I barely talk to my therapist my cat doesn't talk back Nuclear War by Sun Ra I can't keep it all inside I don't have anyone to watch movies with I think this poem is actually about crushing loneliness if it is a poem at all and let's be honest, we don't really know do we. I remember my friend hitting a girl with a lunch tray in the sixth grade and the feeling before fights in August when the final bell rang the flesh all around you broke into lightning and ran to the front of the school. I felt the urge to smack a girl yesterday. I can't believe my great grandma named a bird after Jerry Lee Lewis but here we are or here I am. Last week my mom reminded me of the pine woods behind Me-Me's house, the ones I only saw with child eyes, close to the ground. Parrots don't die, Jerry Lee lives in Memphis now.

*On Paying a Lot of Attention to Death
and Not a Lot of Attention to Life*

blue lights on the highway & I am
 a crushed truck in the median
unscathed people accelerating on either side

there aren't any dream bullets in my dream gun
 two high-powered rounds
in my duct tape heart

fear keeps asking why I'm still alive

Dream Journal

breaking:

you run into your first college roommate in the street somewhere. her country has filled with water. you slept next to each other for three years but can't bring yourself to ask if she's still dating the guy you both liked. you're worried she might be more successful than you. you try not to step on cracks in the sidewalk as you walk away.

breaking:

a Young Life group is setting up in your head. they're missing a folding table, white. everyone goes to look for it in the acres of this warehouse. inside is a maze of quilts and wigs and glass. the only white you find is a shelf of handbags. they're all empty.

breaking:

your grandmother is stacking logs against a fence. there is cancer in her bones. log after log clicks against its neighbor. you wonder when she'll start building the fire.

breaking:

you fall onto an air mattress with someone you love. virginity sleeps in a corner. scrutinized by this angel, you only imagine touching the person next to you.

On having been drunk and alone and miraculously unharmed (on taking a bath)

i smell now like a baby
umbilical numbness
my return to flickering womb
this rock caul behind me
whispers thunder

i wash
a sprinkling of twigs, all that's left
of my discard

i wonder how i smelt
to the woman who carried me home
i wonder if she remembers my apologies

i remember another time
with another girl
when i was the woman
sneaking around to pee in a bush

her hair more textured than mine,
more holly
affixed to it
emittance round her mouth
her sobs shocked me

like the other night we had to fetch a man, someone to support this dead, drunk weight

that was the only time i met her
and i know she doesn't remember me
i know she doesn't because she fell asleep in a house fire
about a month later.

i don't know what to say about that except i'm still living
i wrote once that i am still being created
but no
i am still being born

Bath

I lock the door
I shed a skin
I see in layers—
the door at the foot of the stairs,
the front door,
the bathroom door,

me

spinning but not
luminous I pinch myself
with mirrors and whisper
'nevermind'

inside, my flesh becomes a child
a ruddy baby I lather in a sink
I scrub this quiet self
whose thoughts won't run clear

After,
the child kneels in the tub and dams its fingers
trying to catch our filth before it runs down the drain

Anti-Natalism

father is deformed
a squelching suckling thing
reduced
to death drives and ego dances

you are not his daughter
you have never betrayed each other
your mother was made of revolt
and cauterized the womb

soon, a new summer will appear
and all will crinkle like hot grass
eroding
 breathtaking

Hyperventilating,

you crawl beneath your coffee table as if reentering
the womb

in elementary school, you were taught
 you'd be safe here,
but your exhales still
 stick inside your mouth

you wish to surround yourself with blades
 blades of
grass venetian blinds
 a ceiling fan

you sit half-lotus
 before your bookshelf
 grab *Suicide*
and drift
 to your decorative pillows,
discarded and unwed

you keep defending your use of sage
 and your boyfriend hates seeing you like this.

your legs take you to the fridge.
 you eat a single olive.

Panopticon

Most of my dreams are spent in airports. TSA lines,
specifically. One guard, hundreds of travelers smudged
blue with quiet murmurings and outer layers.

Shanks of white light break through the ceiling
of this brutalist orb, crisscrossed and
nested with ramps, staircases, human conveyor belts.

Past security, the rest of the airport spools out
into a mall—a chic furniture store on one end,
two levels of formal dresses on the other.

When I look over the banister,
mist covers ground and the elevators
never come. The floors aren't numbered.

I don't remember the entrance,
the first floor, why I left myself
inside.

Mother-Daughter Date after Hospital

new pink morning I prod
this body's bones, wait to scar

wait for her call. she rushes
up hills for me, gathers new

pills for me. we both wear sweatpants
and the eyes we share are tired.

at the diner, we speak of nail polish
and I say, "It's hard to find a good

mood," and it is,
but that's not what I meant.

a fork clatters from above,
misses our silted coffee cups

I know this as an omen—
I must forget the winter of my birth.

in the craft store we tread like angels
like trauma-bonded mother

and child. cotton-wristed
fuzzy-minded I remind her

of who I used to be, who
I've always been. we ice skate

back to an apartment
of open doors—

like the Hope Diamond, like
the nuclear football, don't

take your eyes off of me.
That afternoon, my therapist

says I sound like I am in a wind tunnel
and I wonder why, even when I latch the windows,

there is still so much
goddamn wind.

Invasion

I crave salt and green and trees and bells
and wish for many faces, like tarot

and the incense of Ukraine pours across the ocean
and fills my home with plumes of ash

and, as the oracle, my role is to inhale
and drift until answer

I step outside to a long lonesome howl
that covers everything and then disappears.

the plane passing overhead is not a warplane yet.

On becoming stone

nightsilk flowing
 like the river
 I'll never be
glazing

the folds of my body
 chiseled waves
 these white eyes
poured into place

still and joyless
 a winter moon
 every strand of hair
sculpted into motion

aphrodite beckons
 museum-quiet
 I wash
my paint away

from waist to collar
 a fissure
 wishing
my undoing

I ask
 preservation
 or
collapse

The Etymology of Pussy

“Cats do not go to heaven. Women cannot write the plays of Shakespeare.”
—Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

(1.) from *puss*, always meaning cat, perhaps preceding it; push tongue to teeth, say / *come to me* / with a hiss.

(2.) an affectionate term for a girl or woman. from *puse*, meaning “pouch” or “purse”; divine receptacle; *le chat*.

(3.) see also: *pussy-whipped*, descendent of *hen-pecked*, which is a cousin to *cunt-beaten*.

On Finding a Pool of Blood on a Snow Day

ice so thick my boot doesn't break through
I slide along no footprints
against gravity
light handrolled cigarettes
with these gloved hands

the white plain stretches still
charcoal drawings of a
low stone wall and a
deceased oak I want to call home

ahead I spot a shock
a crimson
disturbance

a hoof broke this ice this murder
will evaporate no one knows what happened
except the hunter and the hunted

My grandma has open heart surgery while the Queen lays dying

a lily-white woman lies upon a bed of
doctors' palms inhaling
nourishment and perfumed pillows I see
the pilot of "The Crown" that eerie
royal womb where physicians materialize to stick
their gentle thumbs into the king's rancid lungs
these are the doctors who make house calls
the ones we've heard of but have never seen

-:-:-

a woman rosy with freckles
sinks into cheap cotton and
a sheet of vinyl that might as well
have "you are not welcome here" inscribed
on the tag the sun
crawls up from behind the ocean and
everyone is here but not
everyone because dogs aren't
allowed in hospitals and I'm hiding in the hills
in my own numbered room

-:-:-

lily-white people laden
with pearls gather at the lily-
white woman's side their
rate of travel is impressive
as if they could control
the wind only one detail
separates this gathering from a Christmas
card the lily-white woman isn't upright
and beaming anyone who is not family
is sweeping the nave still muttering
she could live forever

-:-:-

anyone who is not family must
wait in a padded foyer decorated in varying
shades of chocolate milk two floors
below the operating room the
not-family sit amongst people who are family
and share eyes through the fish tank

who wakes unafraid?

Timberline memories

my cat broke your vase and i'm still your broken daughter. you rehome the air plant to a memory by the sink. the memory of a wall clock hovers nearby. through the kitchen window is the memory of your bird feeder, the footprints of twelve years with a yellow lab trotting behind me, an imprint of the time we made popcorn strands to hang around the evergreens, when they were still growing and new, pricking ourselves with needles to feed the birds. i remember wishing away the grass burrs lodged in my bare feet, wishing god would send the weeds to my cousin's yard. i think that was the first time you told me not to wish bad things upon other people. i just remembered falling through the tarp at the top of the playset, crashing into the sandbox, not ready to hold my own weight. i remember being forbidden to use the monkey bars, sneaking up the ladder when you turned toward your lambs ears and roses. i remember being brave and loving trees, like really really loving them, considering them friends. i remember breaking ornaments and playing with hot wax. i remember the word cautious, the time when two angers filled the house and there was hardly room for one. i remember spark plugs mashed into the pavement by tow trucks and broncos and begging dad not to cut the honeysuckle. i remember the love my father built into that treehouse, us camping out in it as soon as he finished, cozied up with sleeping bags and the salt of fresh plywood. i remember the blackbirds didn't let us sleep that night. i remember it didn't hurt as much as it should have when those boards were hauled away.