

three poems

by

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*Praise*

Because my grandmother's  
final days lasted twenty-three  
years & so we'd rush  
each time, say goodbye &  
goodbye: *Te quiero*  
*mucho, Abuelita. Te*  
*adoro.* Because my  
mother's truest mother  
is grief, who taught  
her the slack-jawed  
abandon of joy. Because  
my daughter strung  
together a four-syllable  
word this afternoon.

Because I say *I love you*  
*so much* to my wife  
mid-fight, & we chuckle  
sometimes between  
barbs, like we forgot  
which characters we  
were supposed to play.

Because I was given  
a best friend for all of  
six years, & we  
hand-wrote letters  
each week in bright  
ink, dreamed of whose  
hair would give way

84

first. Because the dusk  
gave me a reprieve  
from the storm on the way  
home from daycare today.  
Because the rain is a stubborn  
guard when I'm most tired &  
Grace refuses the chariot  
also known as the rickety  
stroller that has somehow  
not yet quit. Because  
Brent metamorphoses  
those ticking minutes  
everyone else loses  
sleep over: shows up  
an hour early or makes  
me wait while I re-read  
the menu I've had memorized  
for a decade. Because we pretend  
we don't know what we'll order, ask  
each other, then get the chicken  
pad thai every damn time. Because  
my sister & brother were once  
small enough to make a home  
of my curled arm, because I loathed  
their arrival until that moment  
on the seventh floor of Mount  
Sinai. Because there are no  
half-siblings. Because my body  
begins to fail a little more each  
morning in minute & quiet  
increments like gradual,  
gorgeous rust. Because  
only survival gifts us those  
let downs that remind  
a persistent marvel it is  
still here. Because I courted  
death too long but now

dream of my retirement  
porch. Because my son's  
scalp at seventy-six seconds  
old; the three weeks he barely  
slept for more than fifteen  
minutes; the lunges that shaped  
my quads & calmed his  
sobbing just long enough.  
Because I have wanted  
to be a father as long  
as I have feared its weight.  
Because I exhale knowing  
I cannot fail what I cannot  
leave. Because no one  
I know has grown more  
in three decades than  
my father. Because right  
now: the oven is performing  
its miracles, November  
is teasing us with its slow-  
building chill, my daughter  
is coloring in vibrant looping  
scrawls that look like cartoon  
fireworks or the curls  
wreathing the large  
eyes she's borrowed  
from her mother  
& finally:  
I am home.

*A Blessing for the Internet Troll*

When you tell me—I *hope*  
*you die*—and post a meme  
of an obsidian-skinned  
woman, faceless and stripped,

with watermelons in place  
of ass cheeks being pinned  
down and sodomized by  
a white man in uniform,

and you add a flurry  
of laughing emojis above  
the looping six seconds  
of film, all in response to

86

a poem, I wonder about  
the mother who loses sleep  
over your birthday. How many times  
have I mistaken pleasure for joy?

I've dreamed about pinning down  
my bully in Times Square,  
removing a heavy Glock  
from my waist and demanding

he strip while tourists live stream  
the moment to every person  
on earth. Watch him beg and cry  
and suddenly become human.

I block the death threats  
these days, delete hate mail  
from avatars I know offer a flimsy  
veil to what could easily be a scared

boy trying to survive ninth grade.  
Or maybe the keyboard hides  
a CEO on his off-weekend missing  
the daughter who just lost her

second front tooth as he scans  
the internet for strangers to troll  
as though it is a meaningful substitute  
for touch. I wish you a version of

yourself that is better than  
mine. A life that ever leaves  
you in the wake of its gentle  
and endless awe.

*Thieves in the Temple*

*after Jon Sands*

On the side of a highway  
in rural Indiana  
3,246 homemade wooden crosses  
stand impassive as deserted  
buildings waiting to be gutted.

A sign above them:

*Each cross is a baby  
a woman chose to kill*

*today.* I consider driving across  
the faux cemetery, riding  
free and anointed across  
its hollowed back, picture  
the landscape emptied  
as the shops on Main Street.

88

Flanked by cornfields, I spot  
a large church and imagine  
its opulent, sturdy pews clutching  
a gaggle of worn faces like a fist  
of light. I wonder what Jesus  
would have done? If the theft  
of His good breath would have sent  
Him raging towards these brittle  
and stiff-jawed men  
still scrapping to exchange  
their stubborn grief  
for a currency tangible  
as mistranslated wisdom.  
Would He have razed  
this pasture, made of it  
another kind of house?