

three poems
 by
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Don't We Also Hold Each Other Up?

If the preacher brings snakes to service
 in a wooden box, if he opens the lid with
 a hooked stick, it means the lord moves
 despite my disbelief.

Woman, let me tell you

a body coiled above a man's head could
 be deadly, could be you.

When the church burned, I glorified the match.

Everyone assumed the devil sighed
 into a hollow tree, left his seed in a back
 pew spilled into embers, clean red.

Disembodied is the spirit, wound around
 my arm as a tourniquet, bell chord traced
 from chapel to trailer park, beginning of
 turkey season where the men hunt birds

but what of it?

If a church lady breathes on your neck,
 you know you've been blessed.

I've been carried by women from
 childhood to my own lost blood,
 fried chicken licked to metallic marrow
 split through and halved.

Acts of Protection

Carry the bat as though
she's a newborn found
clinging to the sheers.
Feed her the fried fish
you offered
to your husband
but he refused –
a belly full of rum.
Ask her
to lie down on the bed
under sheets
you bought from
the expensive boutique,
Egyptian cotton,
the color of good sunburn.
Praise her brushed fur,
glass eyes you've seen
in a taxidermist's shop,
this enjambment
of meat and tiny bone
flexed, poised for flight.
Refuse to cover
her ornament of teeth
when she opens into
half-smile. Your father
would scoop her up
with his bare hands
but this is not a poem
about patriarchy.
Here, you can offer her
mint tea, build her a shrine
and ignite it.

If Your Eye Causes You to Sin

hold it in your cheek as a ripe cherry
plucked candy red as though it were made
to carry a lake. The lake you conjured
from your mother's porch, somewhere
in Ohio where the rain reflects a murmur
of drunk geese, stammering from your
father's empty cans. Isn't it always
the eyes that go first, then the spine, until
everything is hollowed out like a drained
pool. Once, I lay naked in the woods
until ants built a tower on my chest,
marched from the trees to my ribs as if
I would fill them dew-soaked leaves,
crumbs from a blueberry muffin I left
in my bag. I'm tired of so much betrayal,
walking into water I can't swim, precursor
to loss I wade through with the mud.
Tell me where my eyes can be safe
from moccasins speaking in tongues,
red squirrel I hit in the road but don't stop.
What difference does it make to pick it up?