Strike-Slip

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STRIKE-SLIP

by

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Abstract

*strike-slip* is a work of poetry in which a female speaker seeks answers for a violent past she is just beginning to unravel. By revisiting and reconsidering scenes from girlhood, including the broken objects and split bodies she encountered in the Appalachian wilderness she grew up in and around, she attempts to gain insight into a present state of selfhood that continues to elude her. The poems here come together to conduct an excavation—each memory is an old bone from which the speaker must carefully brush the dust away until she can figure out something about the larger thing it used to be. That is what this work is: an excavation, a piecing together parts of a life that have been scattered over years of trauma. Yet in another sense, this work is also interested in the act of dissection: slicing open the body of the past in order to discern some divine sign hiding beneath. The speaker of this work repeatedly takes on the role of haruspex: observing something by its broken pieces in order to learn something about its hidden nature. And by looking upon these broken-down objects and bodies, the speaker is able to discern something of her own wild nature. By placing her faith in these grotesque and deconstructed objects, she is able to interact with the divine, making a church of the wilderness.
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bitten girl

it was like holding onto fire that she couldn’t smother she was just seven she was just doing what her father wanted when he pointed his shotgun off a bluff said go fetch every empty shell she could find on that steep hill it will be just like hunting easter eggs he said so she stacked each shell neat beside his crushed heap of beer cans disappeared once more into the woods proud girl so quick to spot the hollow plastic tucked bright in the dry leaves to predict where they’d land as shots cracked overhead and when one nuzzled in the underbrush with a nest of baby snakes tangled like a bundle of whips in the leaves no sign from her father that he would take her into his arms as she stumbled back to him no move to press his lips to her palm swollen but still so small only a slow truck ride home to her dark bedroom to a night writhing in her sheets began to rustle like a brush pile burning her body from the inside sent her snaking from her bed to the cool wood floor until dawn fell over her face like a light left on in the kitchen where her father still sleeps with his boot heels on the table if she doesn’t seem real maybe she was just another story on the school bus from those girls who whisper about a bloody woman you see in the mirror when you turn three times in the dark
but sometimes I could swear she lived
and I knew her she showed me scars
dotting her hand think I even pressed
my finger into the divots of her skin
became my skin as I filled it with my
fingertip felt fangs not just where fangs
had been I always furrow over mis-
remembering her is to feel those bites
all over all over again I forget when
all the striking started in this fever
dream a bitten girl holds me under
field over which the heavens rehearse rapture

I’m not used to letting things lie there and show me how to take it dovelet through the eye of my breezy blouse your hands slip-stumble like earth under thunder clap just a little when I show you this trick I’ve been practicing with my eyelids downturned like a sleeping lamb don’t you find it convincing don’t you want to come at my throat with a glint I know who I’m fooling how when we’re rolling downhill my head hits all these rocks that aren’t real and when the sky turns this hue that says it’s going to split I know I have a while before it drops what it’s been threatening after all this time you’re not going to make me lie down if I don’t want to I’m not going to teach you any knot I can’t slip
black snake writhing after the head is removed

I looked to the old man axe-leanig to the porch stairs axe blade dusted with dirt save the bright splatter my hands wrapped my throat too late to choke my scream already lived died sent the rickety man running sliced the snake in two I was young then and did not know better I did not know how many men would come from far off show me how to be afraid far better to be bitten to feel thin spine whip my ankles than to watch the headless thing parting the grass to say this dance will not be over
to love by tucking it away and running

after tripping with a coat pocket full
of eggs a hen had been keeping secret
in a tipped bucket suppose I should’ve
known better than to covet a clutch
and dash off with the click-clack of
shell against shell snug inside my coat’s
silk lining so dreamy how neat it will be
to unbutton my pocket show off that
egg with speckles all over as if I had
been the one to splatter it reminds me
of the spring my mother took eggs from
their carton drained them held them up
one by one as I colored each with a brush
in my small fist taken they were tucked
inside a glass case for most of my young life
still vivid like questions I cannot touch to
crack apart didn’t I know my hands could
 crush something like that or how it would
feel to throw my body over something I
wanted to keep what was seeping from
my pocket it hurt to see that particular
hue of yellow soak dark to my hip-
bone still bruised from the fall
a girl’s first field journal

tooth-gleam from rabbit skull
no fur save a patch of thinning
auburn on holey cheekbone like
that worm wooly mostly ocher
but look a spot of black now
trees drop fire they cannot hold
storm strings a thin branch with cold crystals to drip is to chime sweet clatter are those berries frosted with sugar bright red trail in the snow dear cardinal trickling from the barn cat’s jaw
might the tulip thrusting bright
from the soil demand sunlight
might cupping the spring in my
palms make the water warmer
or my skin colder why choose
to hide my hands in pockets
to think that papery nest is all
wood-gnaw and bee spit how
soft to brush my ear against
the hot hum before breaking
a blackberry under my tongue
lick my sweet lips they are ripe
eight months before the split

in dreams I hunt the stink of rabbit head summer dropped on our doormat thin velvet sinking into skull a spell from which you cannot drag me maybe not all rabbit parts are good luck let’s talk prescience slice to the marrow of the matter before something eats it from the inside what does it mean that it quivered like no dead thing I have ever seen even after you knocked it from the porch with a broom handle I kept it behind my eyes at night turned it over and over like some trick knot when I pulled its grey lips from the teeth it began spitting crimson unwinding like string I followed where it led you wouldn’t believe how alive
if the woods could swallow what

rasp of the thicket tells it like couldn’t keep a secret if it had to burrs nuzzle my ankles just so I’ll strip my socks and lose them I admit I have been asking to be bitten this deep in the woods to fall and wait for someone to hear it though I have heard it really doesn’t work like that there’s no drawing the venom back out of the girl back out of the woods no remedy pooling in petals to sip meanwhile nothing will keep quiet some gravel-mouthed bird grates an elegy wood splits beneath stutter a beak’s grim cadence as veins turn black not blood but sap
spinning like this spider is speaking

look I didn’t tiptoe this high
wire act didn’t string myself up
in glinting spit in this gusting
sycamore to be considered any-
thing but heavenliest of bodies
when you look up to me oh my
have you ever seen an abdomen
like mine so golden am I not
something of a lodestar for you
haven’t you come to measure
each state of wonder by its
relative distance to me there is
no way to tell how fast the crow
flies since he never comes near
enough for me to know that
he wouldn’t dare swallow my
wicked shade of yellow quite like
you have yes I know entrapment
when I see it I know you have
come to find me more holy
than sinister a saint crowned
in light glowing impossibly from
raw canvas or a halo spreading
around a moon so divine you
have to squint to see it though
I know you see me aren’t I
miraculous enough to believe in
holding firm to flimsy against
the sharpest bites of wind aren’t I
the queen I the gleaming corona
circling your heavenward thinking
when I rename the garden

backyard hydrangeas blooming sloppy watercolors I cannot call them
anything but strip branches to the slick and green underneath call you
to my side and you will not run I will wrench this spring from you all
bruised petals and scatter your boyhood snatched in the woods as you
tripped a corpse beneath your feet oh it was your first you
shouldn’t have told me isn’t that the same gape my mouth opening to
summer scorch crawling in your gut I will gnaw you breathless I am
nothing you say I am
I do not think to leave a mark

though I never fail to find your forearm pale underside when our bodies bend to sleep when I miss the grimace you are quick to swallow when I have spent everything not my teeth if I tell you I have to say it sharp imagine a dense wood in that blank wall behind the bed frame something has been hiding inside what roused you too early circling your neck was it everything horrible you’ve ever dreamt most nights I am all hackles and sweat then I remember what my jaw can do I would not stand for anything else to carve into you
even as my father’s eyes met yours
across the pointed barrel nudging
feathers aside to your pink breast
pressing cold kiss to keel bone
with such nearness of course he
knew nothing would be left of you
why didn’t you when he was just
a distant twig-snap but really
you cannot know what you have
come to mean for the daughter
of the man before whose muzzle
you broke into a bloodless cloud
of feather confetti it’s funny really
because my father has never once
told it without laughing I confess
I have had my share of giggles at
your expense but as a girl grows
older she begins to see the gore
behind the fairytale split open in
the darkening woods oh yes once
at his most introspective my father
did say he was pained to think you
might have been his father reincarnate
I count this moment among a handful
of moments I sensed a stillness in
my father’s bones like that shadow
as his gun crept over your chest
look it in the eye if you are brave
my father showed me all there is to
aim and fire but you taught me to look
hard at the man who might hurt me
II.
a dissection of the heart in which something has gone wrong

I confess there has been no carcass I’ve ever stumbled upon whose gape did not portend some gaping in me, a maggot-crawl I feel in the palms of my hands that burrows deeper and carves along my bones until I am sure I will cave around it. That summer evening spent in the woods, when I found what was left of the stillborn fawn, I realized I was all that was missing of the stillborn fawn, and at once I could say I knew myself. I have learned the stink does not always follow the rot, some skins ask to be stripped, and there are creatures who are all but split and strung from the trees before they can drag the last wobbling knee from their mother.
The barn cat, who thought I was not eating, arranged animal parts on the doormat each morning after hunting all night. I made sure she was not around when I shook the mat clean off the porch to the bushes below: tawny fur, heaps of entrails, liver and lungs licked clean and gleaming. But then came the morning the cat left the small eye, it perhaps once belonged to a rabbit, a clouded jewel placed in the very center of the mat. This, I think, was the one thing I could not let drop from the railing, and though I did not touch it or carry it inside, it kept appearing in dreams, set in gold like a ring, so that I could not imagine it anywhere but around my finger.
As we walked the property’s edge, where the woods opened to sloped pasture, my father urged me to walk quickly by the brown calf on its side whose abdomen had been gnawed away. I told him it did not matter how broken it looked or how quickly we passed by because the stink spun the story of the day the calf fell to the ground with sickness and could not answer its mother when she called at dusk until night brought a sharpness the calf could not see. My father walked far ahead the rest of the way down the mountain, and I lost sight of him as it grew dark. As if it would be enough to say: the woods swallowed the girl without bothering to turn up the dirt.
As a girl, I walked into the morning after the coyote tore through the chicken coop, when the ground seemed hallowed with hen fluff and the dew anointing the grass had yet to dry. I remember thinking this was how prayer must feel except I wanted less to shut my eyes or drop to my knees than to follow this strewn path of feathers wherever it might lead. And though I never found even one bloodied bird, I did find that I was less interested in heaven or hell than this space in the middle where I could slip inside the cloaks of ghosts or try on the jowls of the killer to know which one fit best.
I grew to know my mother as a woman whose panic could conjure danger before it ever was, as if by fearing it she created it: wolf spider perched on her arm when she woke to check her wristwatch, hawk whose neck snapped against her bedroom window and left a spreading crack, rattlesnake poised to strike her ankle one of the few times she walked in the backyard. When my mother left, my father revealed that she felt a deep sadness when I was born and began having visions she confused with what was real. When my father confronted my mother about having found a kitchen knife in my nursery, she sobbed and said lately the changing table has seemed so much like the cutting board.
I felt most drawn to what I can only think to call the dark during summers spent at home with my brother, who followed me into the woods if I told him to, with eyes as blue as mine, but warmer somehow. We once came upon a fallen doe, all that was left of what the hunter had stripped away. I pulled my brother down to kneel beside me, beside her, and reckon with the insides, memorize them, watch the squirm of them. And when he said he wanted to run away, I pinned his wrists to the ground. Though I’d like to think I made him look because it was the realest thing he could ever see, and I was beside him and could tell him not to be afraid, I really did it because I liked to watch something of him break down.
The baby rabbit was still alive when the barn cat brought her into the basement. The cat pinned the rabbit to the stone floor gingerly, with no indication she had stuck its fur with the claws I knew were plunged deep. They might have been two stuffed-animals tumbling together in a child’s room: no sound but the soft thrusts of the rabbit’s back legs against the cat’s jaw. Then the bite, a single pop of the rabbit’s neck, and in minutes the cat had swallowed it whole, along with every bone, and retreated into shadow. I saw the cat had left something when I walked closer to the spot. She had somehow managed, in the frenzy of killing, to leave a single eye.
Soon it was no longer a coincidence that when the man came over the hills to visit, animal carcasses lined the only road by which he could reach me. He took its sharp turns at high speeds, tires screaming black lines on the road. I never thought to tell him to slow down, to give the curves their full berth rather than cut them down the middle. If I had, I might have thought to turn from the man in the driver’s seat. To look out from the passenger window, beyond the blur of branches, to the bodies the wilderness had opened for me, asking me to mind the entrails, to consider what might be nudging inside them, to be honest when it felt familiar.
The deer, ribcage yawning the evening dark, looked to have been scraped across the asphalt since dawn, over hours of cars streaking in both directions, and whatever might have spilled from her when she was first hit had been sipped dry by the heat. I did not tell the man driving to stop, though I thought only of the deer for the rest of the night, how the day might have scattered her pieces. I wondered at her heart, how many hoods she met before she felt the beating stop, and her hind legs, bounding to the last pulse, as if to run on without her.
You need something underneath it, his mother had said. When I stepped into the hallway wearing the white skirt, when I placed my glass on the wooden side table, when my makeup could not hide how sallow my face had become. Something underneath it: the ways she would deny who I was before I met her son, pulling him aside to say my hem should hit my knee and no woman worth having should show the skin above it. Something underneath dreamt of running through the briars and leaving my skirt behind when it snagged, dripping from the prod of branches to prove I was not porcelain and there was something underneath.
I think of my mother when I turn into the gravel drive of the house where she and I no longer live. Where my father lives alone, where brush and briar have overtaken the hill so that each time I visit, the house becomes less visible from the road. My mother and I turned into the same driveway fifteen years before, and as our car crept up the gravel slope, we surprised a grazing doe and her two fawns. *Look at her tail*, my mother had said, and it flickered to reveal a shock of white that sent the fawns hobbling over to gather behind the doe’s back legs. I do not remember seeing a signal from my mother before she bounded away somewhere I could not follow.
During sacrament service, I watched women cover little girls’ shoulders when they wriggled from the sleeves of their cardigans and pin their knees together when their small legs splayed. When the tray of broken bread was passed down the row, the well-behaved girls barely opened their lips to place a piece on their tongues, chewed slowly with downturned eyes as if counting the ways they had sinned. Once, I saw a girl fill both of her small fists with bread and refuse to release her grip when her mother tried to pry the pieces into her lap. I could still hear her screaming from the hallway outside of the chapel, telling her mother again and again that she was hungry and wanted to be let go.
I should say that when the man slid the ring on my finger for the first time, I sensed something about it didn’t quite fit, and later when I twirled it off and on to examine what about it seemed wrong, I could only think of how unlike that diamond was to the rabbit eye. I wondered what of the eye belonged to me, what of me belonged to the eye, if it was the part that seemed to spread like ink in the water when the man had tipped me backwards to baptize me, if it was still resting by the drain in the bottom of the font, and if I had stepped from the water without it, had I stepped away without sin?
It was the third time the man had strung me to the bedposts, and by then I had taught myself to follow a trail I kept behind my eyes which led to a dappled clearing in the woods I knew as a girl. My spine had relearned the mattress as a patch of moss, my arms and legs had slipped the restraints and stretched wide in the spots of sun, mirroring the trees that held their limbs above my body, not reaching to touch me but to shield me from sight. Something broke the spell that third time, and I knew it when I opened my eyes and did not see the bedroom or the ropes or the man, but could not stop seeing a deer above me dangling from its hindquarters in the trees, stomach split, something dark dripping from its hooves.
I was only a few years older than the young women in the church class I had been given to teach. I had been placed there for the girls to imagine someone like myself when they thought of who they would grow to be. I never told them how different I was at their age, when I was in the habit of kneeling in the woods at night and learning the language of birds whose wings I imagined when it grew too dark to see. I thought they should never know that girl, would find nothing to admire in her, and so I told them to seek only the light and make temples of their bodies and not to speak loudly else they cannot hear their Lord when he whispers.
In our sixth and last summer together, the man and I walked out onto the porch one Sunday on our way to church and found a rabbit’s head resting at the top of the stairs. Whatever had removed the head from the body had torn it away cleanly: its ears were soft and groomed to rich velvet and its eyes, glossy and deep brown, had yet to be eaten from their sockets. I did not realize I had kneeled next to it in my dress and was reaching to stroke its ears with my fingertips until I felt the man grab me by the elbows and pull me to my feet. He knocked the head into the bushes, called it *filthy*. I never wanted to follow something into the dirt as badly as I did then.
The afternoon following my baptism, and I would soon be pinned with the diamond. I stretched out alone in a hammock and convinced myself that the branches overhead stood crisper against the sky than I had ever seen them. But there was no denying that this sun was an unfamiliar sun, could be said to own very little of its former brightness. I began to think it was withholding its fire from me, terrified that I could no longer feel my shoulders bronze beneath it or hear the rustle of heat that made late June recognizable. His mother had said that to be in possession of the Spirit would be like nestling into a soft blanket. I only felt weak, wrapped in gauze like something had been severed from me, and I could not account for what.
When I finally woke, it was a slow waking over years of fever dream, and for a while it ached to look anywhere beyond the scriptures in my lap, the measures in the hymnal, the hands reaching through white curtains in the temple. On the highway back home one evening, the driver of a chicken truck ahead had forgotten to latch one of the cage doors. I followed clumps of white feathers in my car for nearly an hour before I saw something on the side of the road so broken it could not be called a bird. But when I looked closer I saw it had spread a single wing, lifting in the gusts of cars as they sped by.
A few nights I have dreamt I am looking down from the pulpit where the bishop might stand, preparing to address the congregation, but when I open my mouth, I do not share a message from the scriptures and instead begin to tell the girls that they should no longer think of themselves as fawns mute and creeping in the wood, and the mothers should know what they are afraid of before flicking the white of their tails, and above all, the men should remove the knives I knew were hidden within their blazer pockets. But as I speak to those gathered in the pews, their smiles begin to fall and their faces droop until the skin pulls from their cheekbones. Then it is not a chapel at all but a gaping summer wood.
III.
misremembering myself as the mountain

does it seem real when I say it does it
the valley shadowed beneath my eyes
I have worn since I first opened them
to black and blue ridge jagged cradle
from which I pried my spine to begin
walking the way I do always on my toes
on the way down I don’t know which
part of the foot I might use for the way
back up it seems I cannot find the point
from which I first lost sure footing but
I find myself drawn to the murky broth
of a pond in which ridges above float
flattened beneath my feet so I can stir
the sky to pieces with a branch I break
I break my own heart like I used to when I snuck from my house down hill to a boy a car parked lights out he drove too fast like they all do fast through the valley even faster up this mountain road wound around each thrill my heart was after each hairpin left me jilted just the way I liked it tossed me this way that way my hips hit against hard plastic of the car door I still remember the time we spun out our back wheels kissed the edge I still kiss an edge I say I don’t want to slip then I don’t know if I believe it or not
believe it or not I’ve found a groove
since I was a girl a rocky place on top
of every slope to fit my foot just so
I always knew this meant I had fallen
in love or had been fallen in love with
would stay there ever after as hunched
birds stripped blushing ribbon from bones
still remember the first time I lost my shoe
my foot made a slipper of that craggy peak
it was then I became part of the mountain
could feel a thrumming at the heart of it
oh my heart my skin purpling in the gusts
of wind carried a sharp cry when I tried
to free my foot the rock held me with a bite
a bite may not require teeth but should feel deliberate to be felt deep though I have stumbled over many serpents with patterns of all kinds whose only deliberate act has been to dart away brings to mind that joke about hiking to a mountaintop with someone to ask something important they can’t avoid where would they go will they jump no I have to live by pushing everything to the edge I can’t go another step without knowing how it’s going to hurt I want to believe it like fangs sinking in I want to know how it feels to be afraid of me
afraid of me or afraid of what steeps
seem to rise from my skin can a body
be disguised as a mountain can it be
that I bear footpaths of another’s desire
that I stood still as someone slipped from
the very top of me I didn’t see it until
that day I drove away I emerged from
the gap going south in my rearview I
saw that last blue ridge slide from sight
I didn’t turn my head it was mirrored
it was like looking in the mirror for
the first time I knew those ridges were
bones my body grew around forever far
behind me too deep to reach to touch
to touch upon timelessness in trails of my youth I suppose it is possible to retrace my footsteps with longer legs and keener eyes but who’s to say I could ever find the root that looped my ankle or the dip in the rock by my temple that collected a sip of my blood the problem is more than coming too near to see a hue reserved for distance it is the kaleidoscope girlhood twists before my eyes the red trail markers remain the same but lead me to pieces of a beloved mountaintop arrayed just so I can’t be sure if I’ve been here before
if I’ve been here before now then I must have used this branch to carve an x in the dirt and this spot I have marked must betray what I dropped there when my body was split on the ridge when I stood up again could I call my limbs my own did the mountain teach me to walk away in exchange for swallowing what I spilled in soil rocks peek through as if to snag what of my cry still echoes is it possible to trace an outline of a body that has since slipped inside a mountain tumbling endlessly under my skin why does it seem real when I say it does
I am turning to you

the cicadas are whirring the way it felt to prick my fingers on their amber shells and know them like a season that left me damp under the hem I am turning it over if one can figure a creature from its husk then your palms conjured this rasping song in me the knots at my throat unravel it is my turn to name the garden what to call years spent writhing what to call flesh beneath the rope you gleam with firelight it does not lick to blacken there is gold with each singe of your tongue I am turning this evening is the lake I was afraid to drop inside you are moon mirrored murk I am folding under as you press upon my forehead my lungs fill with glimmer I lift
but if there is nothing there

I don’t want to stop imagining
our dry tumble at dusk under
that sky a smear of pastel as if
filtered through the cool eye of
my favorite gemstone I told you
once amethyst was nothing to me
if not jagged it breaks me to touch
a thing so smoothed away so I
looked through you I held you up
close to consider the crags that
come between what I see and how
do I look I have to ask if nothing
has been held before my eyes why
has this evening turned a shade
that insists you are not really where
I think you are glowing violet too
far away why can’t I shudder just
a sliver of you between the prongs
of this glimmering girl in me
what would it mean for you to be
rooted where a tumble had been
though I think I know you are not
the kind to be witched into gold and I
admit loving has led me to see you cut
to the glint though I want to say I do
not need to see how much light you
can catch as much as I need to keep
touching what’s rough of you I need to
stay tumbling in the vague violet of you
you say the quartz crystal is not a kaleidoscope

you’re right it’s more like a telescope when I look through to the candle burning on the nightstand I curl into the carnelian haze of some galaxy you should know what orbits near what edges farther from you every second I can feel my ends stretching so far into space I’ve become thin in the middle I just moon circle drag shadow across my eyes rush of high tide pulling from inside a crystal I know that may seem far out but that’s where I’m coming from lately I can’t look at anything without wanting to smash it turn it sideways watch it wind round and recenter
when the Lord says *I will destroy her*

it is not always perched on a beige loveseat or above a scattering of finches or sky too bright to squint against when the swallowing begins her lips like a hymn her mouth opens like it would if he were listening but I am waiting for a crumb to drop her still hands her neat lap say something messy even her feet uninvolved with the soil even the birds dip and dot the ground before lifting no matter what she says or how high it warbles I hear a life paved over a quiver
when the Lord says *I will destroy her*

I stumbled upon this gouache portrait
once when no one was around just
this turned away woman in the frame
I thought she wore an amber crown
at first but they were tongues of fire
she was all flame beneath her scalp
it seemed to mirror for a moment
when I looked at her I swore I saw
the back of my own head from a pew
nearby all those who see it will not
smother such a glimmering burn if
she was me remember her feverish
don’t say fair please don’t leave out
the laying on of hands tying up her
sucking in the drinking down don’t
soften her edges she is not a queen
she writhes in a hot kind of heaven
to Sarah, age five, already writhing

from the sleeve of a sweater
your mother must struggle to
pull over your shoulders you
are not the kind who needs
a gown to be royal as mother
falls at your feet each Sunday
before church as you squirm
from the straps of a dress
buttoned under that sweater
hiding freckles spilling over
your collarbone will not stay
hidden for long I remember
the last time we spoke Sarah
you told me that was no longer
your name you are Sophie now
I am Queen Sophie and Sophie
I do agree you are wiser than
those women that long line
of women waiting to wrest
your arms into so many sleeves
you wouldn’t believe how tight
silk can be or how they will
slather the spots on your skin
know this Sophie I was not
like them either I want to give
you a field of queen anne’s
lace that will always just be lace
never a sleeve you can wear sun-
spots for all I care Queen Sophie
I wish you would follow me there
reinterpreting the scene beneath a kaleidoscopic lens

I have been thinking lately of an object
it has been crushed on one side

and if I am to lay it sideways in my palm it does not cease being

  crushed on one side

and if I am to place it in a chamber with mirrored walls

  a crushing comes from all sides

I want to propose a past that has gone kaleidoscopic

  can no longer be violent what is violent disappears in the

  seams between mirrors

in which small pieces of girlhood seem to shrink just before

  the edges grow all

the brighter they are the less jagged they

I want to propose a past that rattles at the end

  of a scope I twist slow isn’t something I want to take apart

  I only want to watch this part

what happens if taking it apart is trying to remember how it

only happens when I close my eyes to

  this twirling chamber fills with
a hue spreading as if

it is a bruise it has been growing bright edges since

memory is distance
is distortion perhaps
pressing my own eye
to that jagged rock

since no one else could be said to have been there

eye squinting against
shatter twinned across mirrored
edges like jaws opening
upon small bright

since it is entirely possible someone had been

standing behind me eying
how best to shatter me in
a moment my eyes were fixed

upon a shattering elsewhere upon a seam a facet a glint

never here not really there

these girlhood tricks

look how small
and bright how they split
the dark thrust your eyes
down this tunnel this
twisting chamber

these tricks of the light

they have been cut away to show their bright

insides try to look anywhere but

it was entirely possible what could have been

the brightest part of the scene
wasn’t just a stone fixed in
a gold band it was a whole
fistful of rock it wasn’t
clear what color
dripped from the jagged side felt less like teeth than soft mouth lifting

yes it was entirely possible what once had been

a dull color before broken
in two a rock rather plain
on the outside opened upon
what seemed like gleaming

rows of violet teeth what was inside the dark rubbed

raw sugar to the lips

this is how it seems to me

what has broken has broken
sweetly

I want to propose this is not my first proposal

waking and opening the door to the house perched on a wooded hill

what rushed in from out was brisk what lay

at my feet was a small splatter
a trinket left by the barn cat

unwrapped from the flesh of a fox a gory trinket

just a little something

I think it sprang from someplace near the heart

the inexplicable desire
to watch a thing
unwrapped slowly

to memorize what it is to see what was once kept from sight

what has been seen that should not have been seen isn’t that how it goes

let alone placed
among mirrors in a
chamber a mind mirroring
what should not have been seen is seen over again

but if I am to lay it sideways in my palm it’s as if it had never been crushed on one side

just as it is

easy to overlook the teeth of such an affectionate creature

for whom leaving bloody pieces on the doormat the nearest expression of what has been seen that should not have been seen that it wanted me to look at all these small bright pieces inside

once it is split how could it have been once composed of these bright pieces after all how small just as it is
difficult to think of that hand as it was that day it was a fist with a rock for whom affection was possible only after a forceful expression of I want to propose a past that shatters

an object so brightly lit I want to say translucent a glass prism slick in my palm edges not so sharp as to suggest how it will slice the pale colorless ray breaks open as my hand is filled with small bright pieces

and if I am to make a fist the colors only scatter across my fingernails an object composed just so anything that comes against it will shatter
look how
it drips from
the jagged side glistens
like sugar spun like
something to lick

tricks of the light

if memory is distance is distortion it has been cut to catch

if I close my
eyes to these
small pieces

cannot gleam in the dark cannot rattle so brightly

in a chamber without mirrored walls what can stay hidden

what of the seams

tricks of the dark

a past that rattles at the end of a scope I break open

what seems to skitter
like many bright gems

only this sharp heap of mirrored pieces

I want to propose a past the dark uncoils around

a rattle I might have known would fill my palm

with teeth