

Our Prosthesis

On Saturday night I hid his prosthetic arm. He was drunk, it was easy; when he tried to run after me he stumbled, fell, hit his head on the corner of the coffee table. I was drunk too, sad, acting stupidly. Earlier that night he had been flirting with my sister and I felt neglected and negligible next to her in her pink sweater. I didn't like the way he kept touching her with his false limb; I didn't like the way she kept giggling at the strange feel of the plastic. I had paid for his prosthesis, after all, so perhaps this explains my possessiveness. When we got home we kept drinking. Before bed I started undressing him: his socks, his pants, his underwear, his sweater, his shirt, his arm. He came after me and fell. His forehead bled all over the carpet. I hid his arm in the basement. Dressed his wound. Put him to bed. Showered. Made tea. I read *The Idiot* deep into the night. My sister doesn't even know who Dostoyevsky is.

Love the Clown

It was too bad about Love
who kept his nationality
secret, who never left the house
without his burnt red wig.

They accused him
of being greedy and perverse.
Of touching children
and stealing.

He was a tickler.
And I didn't like being tickled.

Still, it was wrong of the adults
to hurry him, wigless, out of town.
The way we children took to stoning
his car with hard candy.

God in Winter

Instead of church Sarah
goes to tanning salons.
Feeds on light. Stuffs herself
senseless says the Hairstylist.

Butterfly on a Wheel

O, you tug
at his wings,
tear them
away.
From his body:
gentle
child in yellow, see
him strange
as calligraphy, see
your naked
monarch twitch
with grief, black,
no, no
longer himself.

No wings, now
wish the dead
awake, wake
up! Early love
poems
pressed in a book.

O, you tug
at his wings,
tear them
away.

Small Words Inside Sleep

We share a small space, my son and I. That is why I always hear him. Abrupt, broken pieces of word punch themselves out of his tiny mouth as if he had no will; the words will themselves. He sleeps on his back, his hands in two fierce fists. I've asked around but no one seems to know whether or not it is normal for a two-year-old to speak, with such determination, in his sleep.

He is young, the words are ordinary enough, often monosyllabic: *tree, bus, cup, cut, bug, no, sky, rock, tree, bus, cup, cut, bug, no, sky*. I have taken to recording the things I am able to discern. Sometimes he speaks sentences. Once he said: *I need that*. It shocked me to hear him speak so clearly, with such confidence. His small voice in the night sounds a hundred years old.

During the day he speaks so softly I can scarcely hear him. He responds to everyday questions carefully, flushed with embarrassment, as if he knew more about the words than he should. Living with him I have become both fearful and accustomed to a strange, intermittent kind of silence.

What is a young mother to do?

I have told him the plants in our apartment will grow stronger if he talks to them. I'm sure they now know all of his secrets. He is patient and methodical, makes time for all nine of them, turns to the various leaves and flowers and listens in return. Their conversations make me envious. I have tried to hear what the plants have to say, but they remain solemn and tight-lipped with me. This amuses my little son, who quietly laughs at his silly mother kneeling before the fern and spider plants, hair tangled in leaves, trying so hard.

The Photographer

What it means to carry a camera
is to speak out of the empty
frame seeing God, Sky, Road, her return
and faith in the perfection of deserts.
To picture the quiet man's body in the city.
This is what it means to love, to loiter

In forbidden zones, allowing the girl to loiter
there with you, perhaps, taking your camera
away at intervals and sending you into the city
alone. Sometimes we need to come home empty
handed; sick with strange deserts
in mind we will leave and return

With our long memory of the city,
its sights and sounds to repeat and return
to the missing man in the room, his empty
chair. In his cool bed we loiter
in the dark, patient with the camera
and every sense recalling other deserts,

Other times like this when the idea of deserts
confounded us, when we dreamt the city
was made of sand, tugged that camera
down around his neck, no promise of return,
but something of you, hopeful, seemed to loiter
in the mind of the street, the empty

Bed to go back to, your empty
room a perfect void like his deserts,
the window open where you loiter
like a vagrant in your own apartment, the city
loose with lights, the slow lights of return.
You see he is unpacking the camera,

Cradling the camera, testing the empty
weight of its images, tiny doors of return, her
cold pictures of city, moon, desert.

Lies to Herself

In my thoughts and in my deeds in what I have done and in what I have failed to do. My lies like glass marbles are highly ornamental, they roll and chime, roll

and chime. They whistle, they breathe the sweet breath of muddy flowers despite the swollen down pillows (poor dead goosey) I've used to stifle them.