

## VOICEMAIL

This is not me.  
This is not faithless poison.  
This is not your arms around my  
plethora.  
This is not my aching.

These are not your words  
on the receiver.  
This is not my ticking bomb,  
the eating out of someone's heart.

This is not you or  
your god blinking through  
mutation.  
This is not white Christmas

with me in your kitchen.  
This is me breaking the dishes.  
These are not greasy  
excuses.

This is you in the doorway  
thinking about us  
bending into  
something ugly.

This is me watching you  
enter  
and leave  
like a magician.

# SORROWLAND

“Where words leave off, music begins.”  
- Heinrich Heine

I wear the farmhouse, a thorn crown set ablaze  
with notes and peacocks, bone and gristle.  
Fear has no name, not in the halls of officers.  
Their children set pace, count the rows of  
country homes where women tumble on banisters,  
the tricky ankle's turn.  
I have no words for them.

Puberty turns a boy into a man - but what ceremony  
is his? The trousers and blade to neck, careful shave taught  
by stern fathers.  
Looking in, a boy sees the man with the new mom,  
her noises not unlike the peacocks  
in the yard  
on summer nights.

Girls are in the bloom. How their yellow hair shines, wrapped  
in blizzards and soot. To become a woman, what ceremony  
will do them good :  
forced believers cradling rabbit's foot.  
And wonder,  
the stinking promiser

will come into the house  
now  
that they inhabit.

I will refuse words about us, you know,  
the spinning of gold  
into straw by small hands. Only,  
songs begin in his hold, the demon's throat,  
pushing out life  
where poetry's dead lips  
sealed for good.

## NINE YEARS

I am happy here. It doesn't say so but I am sure it was happiness. The sun shining on our white skirts and sneakers. Two cats in tow. We always liked dogs but the cats held secrets. I am smiling like I don't know what is happening. Behind my head, there's a vague figure of a man tinkering on a truck. It seems as if he's laughing. I could be wrong but I am sure it was something like laughing.

The other girl was my sister. She is grown and married now. She has kids of her own. Between us, two countries emerge and dissolve. We always liked the country songs no one sings anymore. We were pretend Patsy Cline. I am on the phone with her. Now not then. She says her house is on fire. My hands are made of water. We are too far apart to combine the two.

Sister, if I knew that age nine was the end of innocence, what would I have said to you? Could we run out of pictures, dislodge the bodies? Like the part of us being photographed, stripped by summer, is here or blown apart. The shoulder. The skirts. The brown truck and pant legs panting. It connects the dots, the bones to this, you know, and it is not the happiness we thought. And it never will be.