

Crashing of the Tide

A boy
with his back
to the ocean,
hands
in the shore,
crawling,
clawing,
digging out
a moat,
building up
a wall,
building
his castle,
its ramparts:
wet sand
and hope.

A boy
with his castle,
who hasn't learned
to swim.

A boy
with his castle,
unprotected.

A boy
with his back
to the ocean—
the tide rushes behind
breaks the shore
crashes rocks
flattens into
a surge
fast and
inevitable.

And it brushes against his little toe. And the boy smiles, because it tickles.

The water lingers
on his toe as if to say,
“Hi.”
And sinks back again.

And the boy hears
the voice of his mother,
from the waves, from
the little touch of the water,
saying, “Hi.” Her ashes
scattered a few years
ago on that beach, in
that water.

And the boy hears
the voice of his mother,
In the way the tide always stops
right before him. Hears her smile,
“Next time, I’ll take that castle.
Keep building.”

And the boy smiles,
wiggles his toe, hides it
in the sand, stacks another layer
and another, before the next wave
envelops him and his castle,
fills the moat, flattens the walls,
Before receding to uncover a
boy giggling as the cold water
soaks him, as it feels like a hug.

And the boy
with his castle flattened,
smiles as he gets up,
dripping, covered in sand,
shaking with laughter, walks
towards his father, who is looking
past him, silently, at silent waves.
The wind tussles the boy’s hair,
says, “It’s just between us.”

My Hand Warm Like It Was Touched

A blue night on the coast,
A draft through the window.
She's outside on the balcony.
Her elbows on the balcony railing,
She's looking out at the dark sea.
Her dress pale like the moon,
Her hair flowing in waves,
Her eyes turn to me. A warm
brown. Mirthful Nostalgic
Heartbreaking
A small smile of the lips,
A gentle wave. Her hand,
on my hand. For a moment
before I wake, I wipe a tear
onto my hand,
My hand warm like it was touched.
And it's like I lost another friend.

A Sign In the Form of A Ladybug

A ladybug resting
in a spider's web
on the ceiling, on
the windowsill, the tip
of my finger, my mom's
shoulder as we lay
her sister
to rest
in new ground.

And a ladybug
on a blade of grass
to my right—
We're all sitting
in a field of tall stones
and upturned dirt—
And on the back
of my neck, its legs
feel like laughter—
My legs start to feel
tired and cramped, the
service long in old shoes—

And I see it,
"It's on your shoulder,
Look—
I hadn't seen her
in ten years since the
divorce, a week ago—
And I hear a gasp, and some sobs
before everyone goes quiet,
stops at the words.

I hear her voice as
she asks if I remember
all the fun we had—

precious, warm. I smile, a
ladybug—

And I remember the silence,

Heaven in the Ocean

And this is what I imagine:

My story starts on a boat somewhere in the middle of the ocean. It starts with hunger. It starts with thirst. It starts with a woman and her daughter as they run from their country into their own. And they make it their own. Drink the sea, the water, the wind, the sand, America, the land of dreams, but theirs. All theirs.

In the wake of bombs and helicopters, scorched land and hellfire, the woman, my grandmother, must have thought the sea was heaven. Heaven in the ocean. Heaven underneath.

Maybe, it felt like being supported by something divine. Like if you looked underneath the waves during a fierce storm, you would see their small little boat being kept afloat by a pillar of angels. The white wings and golden halos radiating in the dark blue. Their hands supporting their feet supporting their hands. And their hands on the underbelly of the boat as it rises and dips and shakes. Their hands on the hands of those aboard, clasped together in fear, in worry, in hope.

And one of those hands would have rested on my grandmother. The hand would have rested on her brow, would have wiped the sweat and the salt and the rain. Would have been warm. And her hand would have reached up to grasp the angel's, would have let the fear and worry and hunger and thirst all fall away. In the middle of a thunderstorm, I like to think that she would have left the world at peace, hand in hand, flying in the sky, diving deep into the ocean.

And her daughter, my mother, would have held her hand too, squeezed it softly with one hand, the railing tightly with the other. Would have held hope in her hand, love in her heart. Grabbed her mother's hope and love from the air. Took it for her own.

Open Window

I am ten again, no, I am
ten, and my bedroom window is open, no,
ajar.

We broke down the door, no, we
broke down, my father and I, because
that's family. To break together,
to look, no, to open, maybe,
in hopes the other side of the door is my brother and not
some thing lying on the ground. Yes. And so
we open.

And the window is ajar.
And we run to it, no, I run, and
my father calls out his name, I stick
my head out the window. Only a few feet
high, no, a couple.

I call him: "Aidan," no,
"Didi." My father finds him
at the front porch,
he's crying, no,
grieving.

Because back on the couch, I am ten again,
in between my parents, saying, no, asking, yes,
"What is a divorce?"

The Definition of Love

Love is my brother calling me fat
as we put on our swim shirts
And his laugh above water

Love is my brother trapping
me under my mother's blankets
And I would scream for air

Love is his nails
burrowing into my skin
And the way
the blood trickles
down my arm

Love is his hand on my ankle
pulling me deeper into the pool
And deeper still

Love is his abuse
And yet

Love is also him tossing
seaweed rice crackers on my bed
And me saying thank you

Love is him calling me
to remind me to call Grandpa Andy
And ask me if I'm on top of my work

Love is him saying
my name as I walk into our bathroom
And I go into his room to find him
sobbing.

Love is him letting me
Hold him.
And say nothing.

Love is him letting me
 clean our grandpa's kitchen
In silence
Together

Learned Love

My little brother outside with sticks
slashing at imagined monsters, but
I am looking through the glass
sliding the door to the side
squeezing through the gap
closing it behind me
picking up a stick
walking to him
on guard.

My little brother outside with sticks
practicing sword fighting on trees
that stand tall, but break easily
and I'm trying to love him
in the backyard of a house
where I learned to love
a younger brother
is to prepare him
for war.

My little brother outside with sticks
backing into the brush because
he accidentally hit my hand
he blocks overhead, closes
his eyes, throws his stick
at me as he turns to run
he is angry, he is
scared, he is
too young.
He is too
slow.