

It's a sadness so violent
it rots into rage.
A rage so old and starving
it gnaws at my ribs
like something buried alive inside myself.

No one remembers,
The world kept spinning
while the vastness is cut open and discarded.
People speak normally,
laugh beside me,
show me nursery colors and ultrasound photos,
never realizing they are pressing fingers
into a wound that never sealed.

I'm not asking to be worshipped in my grief.
I don't want pity poured over me
like holy water.
But if you need something from me—
my warmth, my patience, my care—
you could at least remember
I am carrying a funeral
inside my body every single day.

Forced menopause feels crueler than death
sometimes.
Death is immediate.
This lingers.
This is my body betraying me slowly,
cell by cell,
month by month,
until womanhood itself feels like a room
I've been locked outside of.

The heat rises beneath my skin
like punishment.
Static-fire freckles burning up my neck,
my chest,
my face.
A scalding reminder
that something inside me ended early.
That my body has already begun grieving
what it was meant to become.

I am angry at the world for making me like this.
Angry at doctors.
Angry at fate.
Angry at every pregnant stranger
whose hand rests absentmindedly on their
stomach
while mine sits empty beneath my fingertips.

I thought one day
I would feel kicking beneath my skin.
I thought my body would become a home,
warm and alive and needed.
I thought there would be tiny socks on my floor,
milk-drunk cries in the middle of the night,
small hands reaching for me
like I was the whole world.

Instead, my body became a graveyard
for futures that never happened.

Celebrate your babies.
You should.
Celebrate the life your body could make
without asking permission,
without bloodshed,
without mourning.

Some of us were not chosen for that softness.
Some of us sit quietly at baby showers
trying not to choke on jealousy so sharp
it feels murderous.
Trying not to unravel
every time someone says,
"You'll understand someday."

No.
I won't.

And that truth
splits me open.

It infuriates me so deeply
I cry without sound.
Tears spilling down my face
while I stare at ceiling at 2 a.m.,
wondering why my body was built
only to fail me at the one thing
I begged it to do.

I watch your belly grow round with life
while mine remains hollow,
cold,
aching.

And somehow that emptiness still hurts
as if there are phantom children inside me
reaching for a mother
who could never reach back.

Drag me back into your thoughts.
 Unearth me the way you once unmade me.
 Split the earth open with your bare hands,
 crawl beneath the roots,
 beneath the worms and flooded coffins,
 searching for the parts of me
 you buried alive just to keep warm.

You planted yourself in me like a disease.
 A thorned vine forced through soft soil,
 splitting me open slowly, lovingly,
 until my body no longer knew
 the difference between devotion
 and desecration.

Repair my garden now.
 Kneel in the mud and pray over it.
 Tell the blackened roots you are sorry.
 Tell the dead things beneath the dirt
 you did not mean to turn them into ghosts.

But poison ivy strangles the fence posts now.
 Nightshade blooms from my ribcage.
 The air smells of wet earth and opened graves.
 The past hangs in rotting vines from dead trees,
 swaying like nooses in the wind.

There is no future here.
 Only a forest of tombs
 where every stone bears a version of my
 name
 you took from me.

Scatter your seed across my cursed plot
 and watch nothing holy grow.
 Rainwater gathers in the hollows of my
 bones.
 White flowers bloom pale as drowned
 skin.
 The ground still remembers
 how violently you entered it.

You called it love
 because monsters always rename the ruin
 they leave behind.

And if you touch me again,
 let it be without your hands.
 Without your weight crushing the breath
 from me.
 Without your mouth turning prayers into
 dirt.
 Without forcing another funeral
 into my body.

Because there are already enough corpses
 buried in me

Baby born no time
to mourn
Boy Girl time
to chill
Man Woman
Blow your own horn
Mom Dad
Sometimes sad
Grandmom Granddad
Time goes fast
No tears at my grave
Time is short
So have some more "Port" (wine that is)

Dark clouds gather above my head
Rain drops fall onto my bed
Thunder and lightning strikes are near
The sound of blackbirds flying in
Carrying something looks like a ghost
Covering the hole with a patch of tin
Taking really good care of their host
Because she is the one who feeds them the most
Seeds, berries, and lots of toast
They shall always be good friends.

I was pregnant once.
Pregnant with the soft idea of motherhood.
Pregnant with the hope
that something inside me
would one day kick back
when I pressed my hand
against my own
belly.

Pregnant with dreams
of holding something warm and breathing,
of breathing in that new-baby smell,
of watching small fingers
reach for mine
as the years unfolded.

I wanted to say it—
out loud,
with pride swelling in my chest:

That child is mine.

But tell me this—
is there such a thing
as postpartum grief
when the child you carried
never comes home?

When what grew inside you
is taken away to a quiet room
and sent off
to be analyzed,
weighed,
named something clinical.

And the doctor smiles gently and says
the good news is
you don't have cancer.

Good news.

But I walked out
with empty arms
and a body that remembered
being a home.

My heart will open
for children who are not born from me—
forever a foster
of borrowed beginnings
and temporary goodnights.

Still,

I was pregnant once.
And some part of me
will always be
waiting
to feel that kick.

One step forward
One step back
As I stagger
Upon these tracks

I see the light
I hear the sound
A big dark shadow
Taking on some height

Getting closer
Whistle blowing
My hair goes wild
My eyes are glowing

As that massive train passes by on the north track
I'm on the south
A brush with danger
That close call.

When I look into your eyes,
I dance in your spirit,
Your soul wraps around me,
And our heart beats, becomes one.

Reflections of the flag

Surviving

Multitudes of change

Chaos to calm

Doubt to trust

Persevering

Continuing towards a common good

Never growing weary

Resilience

Get up and keep going

Never giving up

Endurance builds determination

Mirrored in faith

Obedience

The Nation continues to grow

Maturity

Character

Hope

Normal What is that? Each day the same Routine

Work

Priorities

Friends

School

Meetings

CHANGE

Health

Loss

Identity

Finances

Relationships

Routine is no longer a routine

Who are we?

"New normal"?

What is that?

As petals unfold

They reveal

Color

Texture

A delicate fragrance

Bees and butterflies dance among them

They flit from flower to flower

Humming as they work

we will later taste their creation

Golden, sweet, sticky

Nectar

The earth feels endless, a teacher of depths.
In the sun, working the dirt,
I've come to know
the turning of soil,
how it yields old surprises.
Under my blades,
 clods and clumps fly up
 brown and web-woven;
stones exchange silent respect;
 and a tiny ivory onion
 falls asleep in the palm
 of the spade.
Worms ooze, uprooted.
An eggshell winks
and small birds slowly draw closer
 to my kneeling
as above the sepia clouds
 whirl and an odd sort of freshness
 blends with my sweat.

Tilling: In short time,
 the back grows stronger.
It's that kind of work.
These arms bronze over
 hard-glossed by the heat.
As fields I've found
 call me further, I dig into
independence, to grow my own food,
 into the loamy vernal labor,
and begin to resemble someone
I thought I'd forgotten.

What would it broadcast, the flag
of the future conceived by your heart?
What cloth would you choose
to make public and plain
the look of your dreams?
Through what language seen
out of blood and brains
would you stitch
the totem of your settlement?
What ceremony would you enact
to beckon the wind come bless
and imbue what you imagined
with the gladdening of breezes?
What symbols,
 what words,
 what colors
would you design to scroll
 the first fluttering pages
of your nation's rising soul?
And what if - suddenly!
no later than sunrise, tomorrow,
the task becomes yours to fulfill?

1) Red:

One-legged,
big-bellied
species of ecstasy-
Its' footed pedestal
 set sturdy upon an
an ancient earth-round table,
fire-smoothed from
Moroccan sand,
reminding me of balance
 and travel upon
the back of a beast.
Above it,
 the heavens pour out
the blood of the sun
 the sensual vise
of my fingers
ascend this galssine oblelisk,
 this stemware lamp-post
singing in the rain;
my palm cupped under
 a burgundy breast-
tilting toward the smooth
sip of dreamer's crimson milk.
Before it,
 I am son of Bacchus
kneeling beneath
 a Joshua tree.
My schemes are sung
 in wild-fire verse:
I am satyr of veritas,
counselor of harvest:
I grip the full bladder
 of couraged goatskin
held before me
 as a history
upon the lips of the acquitted

who was once
called criminal.

This chalice of alchemy
calls to hallucinations
verifiable

 and proposing of toasts
to the moon herself-
where the measure of a man
 is the memory of the woman
who made history
with the burnished ringing
of one cathedral bell
touching another's
goblet of skin
 and creating song.

2) White

Transparent, oval
 dulcet lens:
balletic star-dust vessel
blown in the krater
 of burning mercury,
shaped as a tear of joy
by the daughters of Chloris-
soft heart holder
 of tender magnifying glass-
gradual teacher in liquidity's
golden room,
where the sense of growth
slowly adjusts to the bend of light,
turning green to gold
 and gold to aqufier
renewed in mystery
underground
 as a body well rested
arising in wonder
 from a sleep of dreams
remembering themselves.

I had a fevered dream

I landed in Plymouth but, not at the famous “Rock”

No, New Hampshire was where I landed

I have only been in the state a couple of times in what you would call awake...

Lo, here I was in a dream state—beckoned to get my camera and witness what was there

All I could see in my dream was water, fall colors and the heights of mountains in the distance

It was all lovely but what did it mean?

Then it came... Robert Frost once taught there and he wanted to educate me.

In a soft whisper he instructed me to examine the leaves closer

I saw an imperfect leaf- yellow with brown spots and quickly turned away to gaze at a lovely golden one ready for a show

Frost murmured to me—A few yards away that difference didn’t matter... It was all in harmony and beautiful

I woke up and understood... thank you teacher!

We meet. Interest.

Incubation of possibility

Kilowatts of electric current

Definite attraction

Circling like two birds in the sky

But we never land

What we have here is clear

It's called Arrested Love Development

Days. Weeks. Bursts of Magnetic Pull.

Yet we do nothing

Signals fired but no response

Love arrested before it could begin

Sea Gull, Sea Gull—What do you see?

In that sky, miles above me.

You are gliding, floating on puffs of air.

Do you notice me standing down there?

What forces brought you my way?

Is it air currents or water in the bay?

Will a large, shiny fish draw you in?

Maybe it'll be fries in aluminum tin?

Are you aware of cloud formations and hues?

Do you ever wish you had different views?

I love how your laughing calls match mine.

Magically I feel like the water and sky align.

I wish I had your wings to deploy.

So, I might truly know what you enjoy.

I met a man who longed to travel the seas. He was warned of the danger but ignored my pleas.

He was going to hunt for pirates' treasure, explaining their lost gold would bring him great pleasure.

He decided to leave on a clear, starry night, and I watched until his small boat sailed out of sight.

In the morning, a large raven circled overhead, and it brought me a premonition full of dread.

I waited several days for the young man's return, but the sea grew angry and began to churn.

A horrendous storm was commencing to brew, and I knew my forewarning was coming true.

Numerous fishermen were chatting at the pier, so I stepped a little closer, and strained to hear.

They spoke of an empty boat wedged in the sand, and of a young man struggling to reach the land.

They threw a long rope, attempting to help, but the man was pulled under by the surf and kelp.

He disappeared under the cold, frothy foam, and now the bottom of the sea is his eternal home.

Into the waters I tossed a single red flower, an homage to the man and the sea's merciless power.

I stare out the window feeling quite alone, however, I am not. There's a man sitting next to me that knows my eyes are closed to a repetitive evil plot. I do not want to witness the sins that possess a city where no one offers any kindness, much less pity.

On a corner stands a prostitute soliciting her goods to an unfaithful husband that shouldn't be in the hood. Hidden in the alleys are dealers peddling their dope to someone's loved one that has lost all hope.

There are derelict motels for wayward, two-timing lovers, and other rooms occupied by destitute families seeking shelter and cover. There are also the homeless, and drunken sots living in boxes on trash covered lots.

On the street, an old woman cries out as a young thug grabs her purse and runs. A block over, a cashier lies dying, shot by men with sawed off guns. Police car sirens shriek through the night chasing killers that murdered a frail man too weak to fight. Nowhere is there a witness to be found, just a pale lifeless body lying on the snow-covered ground.

I'm not sure how much more I can take; I need a plan to make my escape. I silently slip into the dimly lit room; I'm going to end this evil and gloom. I know he is asleep; I can hear him snore. I need to get this done before his feet hit the floor.

I slowly reach around to the back of his chair, grasping the black cord that is hidden there. Soon I am rejoicing, I am about to be free, as I pull the plug on my husband's big screen T.V.

I decided I needed a comfy new chair; my old one was hurting my vast derriere.

Knowing my budget was going to be frugal, I started my shopping looking on Google.

I tried sitting on a rocker, a glider, then a red and blue seat, even one with luxurious heat.

I attempted to sit in my dad's favorite chair, but geez, he gave me an ominous stare.

I went to Granny's to sit for a spell. She yelled, "Get your butt up or I'll ring your bell.

I drove to a castle to try the King's throne. The guard tossed me out with a menacing tone.

On to a thrift store I continued my search, hoping to find the most perfect perch.

Suddenly, I spotted a large, striped recliner; never had I seen one that looked any finer.

Exactly like Goldilocks, I found one just right, and I purchased it to take home that very night.

Does someone really win if they cheat?
Are people losers when they get beat?

Can talking bad about someone break their spirit?
Even if they don't hear it?

Does intimidation count as strategy?
When people fail to label depravity?

Does the highest score always mark the win?
Or can kindness make a difference begin?

When is it better to give than to take?
Can respect give everyone an equal stake?

Cold winds push sails from dock ahead of dawn,
Brief blink of legal hours on the bay.
On shallow bars, watermen use their brawn
To guide the skipjacks, scooping shells of gray.

Around a dozen skipjacks still at work,
Shrunk from a thousand one century past.
Winds create waves, causing decks to jerk,
Skippers encourage men, "Keep workin' fast!"

Iron dredges pile the oysters on deck,
Culled by crews, as amber day is breaking,
Icy waters sparkle, as cullers check
For life and size; their own bodies shaking.

Glistening snowflakes fall on boards and heads,
Now woken skyline starts to cloud over,
As ships sail back to Crisfield's docks and sheds
'Til next outset once again to rove.

Tiny Thing, Tiny Thing, would you like to spread your wings and fly away?
Tiny Thing, Tiny Thing, would you like to spread your wings and fly away?
This could be the moment; there may never be another day.

Dark clouds are gathering, there's a big storm, it's coming fast.
Dark clouds are gathering, there's a big storm, it's coming fast.
If you wait another minute, your chance for freedom may have passed.

Tiny Thing, Tiny Thing, you may think it's safer just to stay.
Tiny Thing, Tiny Thing, you may think it's safer just to stay.
But let me tell you truly; there may never be another day.

The world is getting darker; streaks of lightning from the sky are coming down.
The world is getting darker; streaks of lightning from the sky are coming down.
Now you can faintly hear it, the booming and the crackling sound.

Tiny Thing, Tiny Thing, do you want to spread your wings and fly away?
Tiny Thing, Tiny Thing, do you want to spread your wings and fly away?
This could be the moment; there may never be another day.

Sometimes it seems like you'd be better off just to hunker down.
Sometimes it seems like you'd be better off just to hunker down.
When big storms are coming and there is darkness all around.

But Tiny Thing, I tell you, you were made to fly away and shine!
Tiny Thing, I tell you, you were made to fly away and shine!
Take off to find your glory, and everything will be just fine!

Standing in their driveway, so much movement around her feet
 The grandchildren and their bikes, trikes, the tiny annoying dog
 and leaves, swirling.
 A ball was bouncing rhythmically, ti-tet, ti-tet.
 But it was the sky above that called to her, made her dizzy with its azure beauty
 Bathed in nostalgia, tugged by unnamed longing

It was tempting to label it memory, that overwhelming aliveness emanating from the sharp
 blue and fluffy white, etched in the contrast at their edges.
 But memory was a word she no longer trusted
 Its edges were too ephemeral; always moving, eluding
 A thought was there, and then

“Gram-mom, Gram-mom!”
 She looked down, felt Cathy’s small hand patting her stockinged leg.
 Cathy was squinting in the cool sunshine. “Gram-mom, will you play with me?”
 “Mmm,” she said.
 “Will you? Will you play?” Cathy was persisting.
 A smile formed, intended for sweet Cathy
 but caught instead by a passing bird that pulled her eye upward along its arc towards the sun
 and then, too soon, past it.
 The crisp clarity of the light was beautiful, and painful.

A breeze cleared some cortical cobwebs and for a moment it crystalized,
 sharp and clearly defined.
 She saw that anticipation itself was the temptress
 teasing her, evoking memories of desire for some new delight
 Aching expectation of impending pleasure

She grasped that gorgeous yearning, wanting to embrace it and taste it,
 but it slipped through her fingers
 a yellowing oak leaf floating to the ground.

From the edge of her reverie she caught the eye of the oldest and mused aloud
 “October. Do you remember other Octobers, Dina?”

I rolled my eyes at the question.
 “No,” I recall thinking sarcastically, “I remember Septembers, and Novembers,
 but not other Octobers.”

But I do. Now, I do.

The saxophone sound of midnight, in the late 1970s, was
a warm, long note with a finish like sweet wine.
Like every such note, every moment,
it had a beginning and an end, but
did we ever witness those edges?
You were there, and the sax was playing, whining, waning
and then it wasn't.

There was no dramatic finale
where the musician, having given his all,
removed the instrument from his mouth to smile and nod,
acknowledging the applause.

Nor was there a fade-out, like the end
of the last song on an album,
the kind that, years later, would betray the aging disco singer on the parade float
lip-synching her famous hit.

Rather, the stroke of midnight
in those colorful blurry days was like
the part of the plot of your dream
that is missing in the morning.
One could be forgiven for assuming that it was just forgotten.
But you knew, even then, that the gaps weren't only in your memory,
but in your dreams as well.

The music that filled your days and nights seemed to flow, fluid and languid,
back in those years before it, like everything else,
was digitized down to ones and zeros, black and white.
But that was an illusion.

When you look close enough there are no fluids, only particles
bouncing off each other, rollicking in such randomness
that together, from a distance, they become both the dance and
the music that drives it.

Who's to say, then, that those silky indigo midnights
didn't slip randomly but precisely into the gaps
between two tiny particles of time, that there never was
a point at which the note actually ended?

Maybe all the notes are playing still, singly and together
like a fine mist
like your memory.

Anna looked up at the Haunted House balcony, where the wooden bat perched. She said to her grandfather, “Papa, in one bat eye I see a man with wet hair, waves, and a dark sky. In the other, there are men in lifeboats!” Papa said, “My mother told me she saw the bat in the 1940s in a shed. In its eyes she saw a drowned sailor who had tried to swim to the beach in an 1883 storm and dying sailors in lifeboats. Those events really happened!”

Years later, a detective on the Boardwalk investigated a body with many small bite marks. He glanced up at the Haunted House bat and froze. In its eyes he could see the victim’s face! Terror replaced shock when he saw blood dripping from the grin and ponding around small animal bones.

The bat was impounded and found responsible. Anna hired an attorney, who conjectured the wooden bat had come to life, needed nourishment and killed humans for it. The bat had flashed images of dying mariners in his eyes (from memory) as warnings. He had probably killed at least three times. The attorney suggested Anna could keep the bat on her property and provide food, water, and companionship. The judge agreed that the warnings demonstrated compassion and concern, mitigating the offense. Anna gave the bat a home.

Designer Bill Tracy’s coffin cars and track were extended onto the bat’s previous perch on the Haunted House. He was not replaced by another creature—no one knowing how the spark of life had begun—no one wanting another need-motivated kill to occur. Today, Anna and family give Bat what he needs and have not seen any images. But they watch carefully those eyes for signs of new demands.

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Full moon lies low in the west,
Venus high in the east, blazing like a sun. A satellite
arcs north-northeast, smooth silent
pinpoint of white.

I rarely see the sky before dawn, but our old
dog wakes up earlier these days. The air feels warm
for this time of year, though frost is coming, even this
far south.

Too early for the great blue heron's hoarse
call. Too late for owls. No geese stir. The sky glow
past the pines either a false dawn or lights from
a chicken house.

The dog wants to keep sniffing the dewy grass
but I need more sleep. We toddle inside. She can't
jump onto the bed anymore. I pick her up.
Frost is coming.

After a winter of dull root vegetables

and too many greens in spring,
strawberry season arrives like

a welcome birthday present, and
when that shortest of seasons ends,
the rich colors of raspberries, blueberries,

blackberries, their trendy antioxidants,
and just as they fade peaches ripen
spilling juice on our hands and chin,

cantaloupes hiding their sweetness
behind their tough wrinkled skins
like the grandmas hoeing raised beds.

When the watermelons and sweet corn
appear in the produce stands we know
we're on the dark slide down to nothing

but waxed apples and hard pumpkins,
pumpkin spice spoiling every hot drink,
donut, and muffin, and we'll soon be

stuck with carrots and parsnips,
rutabagas, beets, and cabbages, all
nature's gassy gifts, bloating us

during the longwinter nights
with nocomfort except dog-eared
seed catalogs and dreams of strawberries.

Because the vultures are migrating and their shadows swirl
around me
Because I pretend I'm sixteen and just learning how to drive,
but no one yells at me
Because a riding mower is more fun than walking behind a
push mower
Because I remember what a chore it was for my father to mow
our small city lawn with the reel mower. He'd push and push
and push it around the yard and come in sweating

Because I do a neater job than my husband, and keep a
lookout for toads
Because I set the mower deck higher than the lawn guy who
helped us one summer
Because it's the least amount of yardwork I can do, keeping
the lawn tidy, and by lawn
I mean a bit of what was seeded (Bluegrass? Fescue?) amid a
half-acre of crabgrass, wiregrass, Dutch white clover,
Japanese clover, black medic, nutsedge, henbit, dandelions,
and look:

Seaside Dragonlets flit past the salt bush
A fairy ring of mushrooms has appeared overnight
A wild white aster I mow around, to dig up later and plant in a
better place

Upon entering the trailhead, you find yourself inside an evergreen sanctuary, with sunlight softly filtering through the canopy of branches above. With every breath, lungs are filled with oxygen-rich air. Step by step along the path, a living tapestry of earth, sky and water unfolds. How exhilarating to explore a new path with fresh experiences around every bend!

At the end of the trail, you will find a lovely little beach cove. Here you will see a shoreline with a haphazard array of rocks in all shapes and sizes. Some are large enough to offer a spot to sit upon. If you accept the invitation of rest, and the weather is calm, you will hear nature's lullaby in the surrounding gentle swells.

Within this setting, a feeling of relaxation washes over you as the rhythmic sounds of lapping water override the pull of worldly cares. Time set apart with God in His creation has a way of soothing us like this...

In many ways, surfing imitates life. Not that I am any kind of an authority on the sport. Having only surfed twice in my life, and only recently at that, I would be known in the surfing world as an old Betty – a very inexperienced female surfer who is on the mature side of life.

Nevertheless, my surfing experiences helped me gain new insights, not only about the sport, but in meeting new challenges. It turns out, surfing is not just a physical test of balance and strength, it is also emotionally demanding. Endeavoring to harness the power of the ocean, to catch and ride a rushing wave, engages the full spectrum of feelings, and requires one hundred percent commitment. Especially for someone like me, who is, you know, an old Betty.

In surfing, as in life, there are prolonged periods of expectation and waiting, juxtaposed with moments of exhilaration. First comes anticipation, when scanning the horizon for a promising swell. Then restlessness follows during prolonged periods of waiting for the perfect wave. You wonder, will it ever come? As an imposing wall of water advances, fear is confronted. You tell yourself you can manage this one. But all too often, disappointment dampens when the ride begins then abruptly ends in a humbling splashdown. Nevertheless, when conditions are right - wave height, timing, and positioning - a portal to bliss is offered. In the rushing of water, body and soul rise together and ride the crest in victory to the shore.

Ever so often,
go where you can hear
a wooden screen door
slam shut.

This sound can take you
back in time to memories,
fun, old friends and family,
both here and gone.

A simpler time in life.
Enjoy the memories.

We live in a world painted with slogans of kindness,
 soft pastels on posters whispering accept everyone,
 yet the air around us crackles like a live wire
 a warning that acceptance has become conditional,
 a door that opens only for those who mirror the host.

I walk through conversations like a tightrope,
 balancing my truth in one hand,
 the fear of losing people in the other.
 Smiles greet me like masks at a masquerade,
 each one demanding agreement
 as the price of admission.

And when I stay silent
 not out of deceit, but out of caution
 they take my quiet as a pledge,
 a nod, a shared banner.
 Because in their minds,
 anyone who disagrees must be an enemy,
 a villain, a monster lurking outside the tribe.
 It never occurs to them
 that someone they love
 a friend, a cousin, a familiar face at the table
 might see the world differently
 and still be gentle, still be good,
 still be someone worth holding close.

Now every conversation tilts,
 slides, collapses into a single axis
 right vs left,
 as if those words were moral verdicts
 instead of viewpoints.
 As if choosing one meant righteousness,
 and the other meant ruin.
 People forget that humans are not arrows
 pointing in one direction,
 but constellations
 messy, bright, full of contradictions
 that cannot be reduced to a side.

And here I stand,
 in the space between the shouting,
 finding truth scattered on both sides,
 finding flaws scattered on both sides.

I lean one way,
 but my roots stay planted in the middle
 a place no one trusts,
 a place no one sees,
 a place mistaken for indecision
 when it is actually reflection.

I watch the sky at dusk,
 how the colors bleed into each other
 violet touching gold,
 blue folding into rose
 and I wonder why humans can't do the same.
 Why must we sand down our edges
 just to be allowed in the room?

Now opinions are weapons,
 names become wounds,
 and silence becomes the safest shelter.
 I hold mine close,
 not because I am ashamed,
 but because I have seen how quickly love
 can evaporate when truth enters the room.

It hurts to imagine
 that speaking honestly
 could cost me family,
 could thin the circle of friends
 until it becomes a single line.
 So I stay quiet,
 a lighthouse with its lamp covered,
 hoping one day the world will remember
 that opinions do not need to match
 to be welcome.

I still believe
 we were meant to be a mosaic
 pieces of every color,
 every thought, every story
 fitting together not because we are the same,
 but because we choose to stay
 even when we are different.

NOVEMBER

November isn't what she used to be. I remember cold days in late November when flocks of big divers whirled around the Bay with a few finding their way to our decoys. Long lines of Canada Geese rose each morning after the sun moving from their roosting area on in Cattail Channel or Gunby Creek to area corn fields for morning nourishment. They'd returning mid-morning to lounge the day away in the creeks and coves of the Pocomoke Sound. In recent years this hasn't been the case.

November is a month of transition. The transition finds its truest form when walking through the woods. The trees begin their winter preparation as leaves carpet the forest floor. Walking with my dog to check an old deer stand provides witness to November's woodland wonder. Arriving at the edge of the field a doe lies on her belly, exhausted, as a three-year-old 8-point buck stands nearby ready for romance when she has the strength to again rise. She rises to her feet and ambles off toward the wood line with Romeo in tow. The dog watches with little interest as they disappear. Following the dog into the stand of oaks three of the squirrels that I've been feeding all winter scurries away from the corn pile toward the treetops chirping wildly. The dog steps in their direction, then thinks better of it.

After a hundred yards or so I sit at the base of a large oak and produce a bottle of water from my pouch. The little stream at the bottom of the ridgeline ambles from the higher land near the highway that bisects the Eastern Shore and runs toward the Chesapeake. The dog drinks from it greedily. An endless parade of orange, red, and yellow leaves dance along its surface being funneled from side to side by fallen branches that dictate flow. Small holes are evident where woodcocks have fed on worms in the soft soil. The shrill call of a pair of wood ducks announces their arrival for dinner reservations. A bumper crop of acorns has welcomed these summer ducks into the coming fall. Fox footprints dot the muddy bottomland. Small, handlike prints of raccoons overlap with those of the fox. A yearling doe, just fifty yards away browses on scrub, then gracefully lowers her head to the stream for a cool drink. Rising with water dripping off her whiskered face she slowly, with the carefree attitude of youth, walks away.

November is too acquainted with winter to make full retreat. She'll often provide glimpses back to the T-shirt days of summer and the hooded sweatshirt mornings of fall. Her relationship with the colder, bitter months is strong. In her waning days our available paths become fewer with the shortening days. In time November will say a final goodbye to that sample of fall she's been hanging onto. The break will be quick, divisive, and permanent. She'll be as permanent as a month can be these days. She's determined to be hard and cold for a few days. She's chosen to shut down growth, reduce change, and simply rest for a bit. As humans we should take note of this. We deserve some downtime also.