

# DEFY

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## Carrying

Suddenly this brokenness. To tell you I lost track  
Of how long the air preserves  
Your sighs, how many times your breath quivers  
At night, who hears them, or pretends to,  
Is like cutting down a tree in a forest  
Miles from the reach of everybody  
In the throes of waking. As in the dream  
I had last night when your bare hands  
Reached out to me, so brightly,  
They could have been filled with light.  
And I clasped them tightly against my chest  
And held onto them and said to you: *I promise,*  
*I know this pain.* How could I have lied?  
This morning, nothing escapes my breath.  
I walked out of this house like an animal  
slobbering for prey, careful with each step,  
Not knowing the earth somehow  
Mirrors my yearning for a feast. I don't know  
Who God thinks He is. I believe His hand  
Touching every trembling thing in this world  
Is a curse we refuse to abandon. When I remember  
The morning you cupped my hands  
And pressed them against the soil, to teach me  
How to make a garden out of twigs, I think  
Of how badly you tried to impersonate the rain.  
The way it asks all of us to take refuge

Underneath roofs we have left to rust, to shroud  
Our skin with so much clothing, to protect  
Ourselves from its needles, just before it gives.  
When I was a child, I only wished  
To be free. When I was the bird I watched.  
When I was the leaf dangling from a branch, waiting  
To fall. When I was the burden of breath I want now  
To let go. If I were still a child, I would wish these hands  
To be empty. I want to hold nothing, the way I hold you.

## Defy

It makes no sense to think  
The world is a child  
Trying to write a poem to appease his grief.  
Nobody listens. You can drop,  
Cover, hold without the earth shaking.  
Only your body quivers when you first hear the news.  
*No goodbyes, just longing*, said someone  
Of my grandfather. Used to call himself Bobby,  
Liked a cigarette in his mouth, loved  
The trees thrusting the thick smoke  
He breathed in and out, and now it's raining.  
He thought God never falls  
Asleep and the noise of the day burning  
With sacrifice is enough  
Testament to His breathing.  
*To let us know we're alive, kid*, said he  
As he winked. It was the time of singing,  
We brought him flowers  
To cheer him up before he fell  
Asleep. He had dreams – he was all the flowers  
We planted in his garden,  
Buried to the neck, trying to peek  
Into the world, see how they reach out? –  
But he's not waking.  
Night, what else do you want?  
I counted sheep after sheep after sheep,  
Patiently asked them to clog your throat, but why  
Am I the one who can't breathe?  
You want these hands?  
I bear no pebbles, but I'm drawn to the ground.  
Once, I dug the earth, cupped a rose in my hands,  
Burned it with prayer. It was Bobby  
Who told me to keep the roots buried  
In the ground. You want these legs?

I swear, I can reach this line faster than he could  
Finish his last cigarette. You'll be glad  
To spread my ashes  
Everywhere. Night, I'm awake.  
I bind my feet to where they belong.  
I stand stiller than a tree now,  
Saying a little prayer, waiting for the shove.  
Do you want me on my knees?  
Shake the earth a little more.

## Sleep

I believe reality is approximately 65% if.

—Dean Young

All bodies are sanctuaries  
Except my body which turns  
And turns each night.  
I dream a forest that makes me shudder:  
Trees hold me, the wind almost  
A whisper of a name, the name almost  
A fever in my chest, as the dead calls  
And calls again. I would like to believe this world  
Is full of ghosts. Tomorrow, as night bleeds into light,  
The promise that the body  
Breathes to wither  
Will haunt you like an old song. In the dream,  
The river sings to pebbles,  
The wind heaves through branches,  
And the heart is a country  
Of calvary. In the dream, I taste fear,  
The kernel of my skull  
As dark as the forest before me,  
Through which I run,  
Through which I violate the peace  
Of trees until light wakes me,  
And silence becomes  
A deafening stillness in my ears.  
Dear sun, when will you eat my shadow?  
Faintly it said to me, when you wake up  
Beside yourself.

## Hypothesis

Half of what I think is false is worrisome.  
This morning, I woke up as a child  
Putting on his shoes, preparing  
To run for a thicket only to wake up as myself again.  
Made breakfast, spoke to myself, stared at a blank canvas  
To find the burgeoning flight of crows emerge  
From it. I must have forgotten to draw the curtains.  
My window deceives me again with the shadows  
Of trees, and I believe everything  
I cannot hold. Half of what I love is dying.  
My grandfather called today. His voice escaped  
My ears the soonest I saw the many routes  
It took to avoid the street named Goodbye.  
Somebody, tell me he will live at the other end  
Of this telephone. Give me a roll call of all  
The names he once called himself.  
Somebody, tell God I will repent  
Before I make a second call and hear  
Only the ringing. A friend once told me that  
When a person dies slowly, the grieving body  
Becomes a hypothesis. Maybe I am  
Still a child, and my days are running  
Toward a thicket. Maybe I know how  
To count but pretend I have no fingers. Maybe  
Somewhere there is a phone ringing,  
And I am elsewhere strolling,  
Trying not to look at the names of the streets.

## Dangle

Tonight, I entered a cathedral  
Of desire. I prayed for the teeth of God  
To break me apart. For his mouth to tremble  
Like a beast whose throat is trampled  
By another and who wins nonetheless. I said to him,  
I want you to stomp on my throat every time  
I say a prayer. Dear God, why do I count my wounds?  
When I was a child, I stood in front of a forest  
And thought of all the women I will never love.  
Dear God, I want to contain myself the way hands  
Can bear so much of the future. Let me understand  
At once why the forest can house the sweetest fruits  
And kill them the next second. How far  
Can a child run into the woods? Is a question  
You refused to answer. Here is a hypothesis:  
A child can run halfway into this darkness. He runs  
Out of it from then on. I am running still  
From so much brokenness. What I want to say  
Is when I throw a paper plane into the air,  
99% of the probability to catch it with these hands  
Is thrown, too, into the thicket. Dear God, I want  
To be a fruit. There must be a stilling rapture  
In dangling from branches. If only I had sprigs.  
If only nectar spilled from this throat. If only  
I tasted sweet and bitter like death. Else face death the way  
You coax me with your sweet days. Amen,  
I say to you. Let death spill into this kingdom  
Like an overflow of harvest for your feast.  
I shall spit into every gutter cursing your name.  
Understand: Every wish is a seed saved  
From the carcasses underneath our feet,  
Pushing itself above the soil like a fist  
To become something beautiful. What I want to say  
Is I am a fugitive. Like a fruit looking for the dangle  
As it learns to love the sweetness of this earth.