

# AUNT CHLOE

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## Birds

I knew how to fly  
I knew how to fly, long before you did  
The sun was my father, the moon was my mother, the clouds were my brothers and sisters, and I  
knew how to embrace them, long before you did  
The wind was my sanctuary—sometimes raging, sometimes billowing, sometimes rolling,  
sometimes calm—and I knew how to glide with it, long before you did  
When my wings grew tired, the trees lent me their branches in exchange for a song of mine—not  
often the same, but beautiful each time  
My melody was too intricate, too attractive, too proud for your simple ears  
You took a blade to my back  
and stained my fanned feathers red

You threw me in front of a shattered mirror and said you were showing me what I truly was:

A fractured thing that couldn't be mended

A tainted thing, brown to the core

A flightless thing with open wounds

where mighty wings should be

My wings were once there, weren't they?

You say they never were, but I know by now that you like to lie

I can hardly remember—can only crave how it felt to be kissed by an open sky.

Most days, I wonder if I can find my reflection again on the surface of the sea

I imagine my spirit whole, untethered, bathed in a motherly blue

I long to reclaim my histories, and fall back onto my memories like trustworthy friends

Is the water my way?

Will my maker grant me the power to swim in the absence of flight?

If I sing, will the waves swallow my music?

I knew how it felt to soar, and I know how it feels to be bound

I can see the sun, the moon, the clouds, and feel the wind from here

I cannot embrace them, but I speak to them. I tell them I hate this land  
and this land hates me. This land pushes more shattered mirrors from its soil every day

And still, you take me from branches that I am not resting on

You pull me from a sky that

cannot kiss me

You cut off wings that haven't been on my body for a long time

By your hands, maybe we have died

Resigning to the oceans, bending in the fields, fleeing into the woods

But our children push on

Building the cities, strolling in the streets, resting in their backyards

They have come across dead birds