

# AUNT CHLOE

**A Journal of Artful Candor**

ISSUE 2022

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## **flagstone**

milk froths on the stove in a copper pot,  
bubbles almost over the edge until she  
thrusts it from the red coil and drains it  
into her mug. an overflow would have

set off the smoke alarm, splotched the  
drip pan with scorched white, ruined  
her solitary breakfast (temporarily—at  
least until she could warm another pot

for hot chocolate). maybe she should have  
let it spill, let it set the house afire, let it  
bring an ambulance and nosy neighbors  
to her lonely doorstep. but she's rational

and almost thirty. so she'll paint her  
house green and plant blooming cacti  
outside, wallpaper rooms with magazine  
pages and surround herself with stacks

of books, hoping that someone will be  
interested enough to ring the doorbell.

**note to my father**

*inspired by Jericho Brown's duplex form*

i thank GOD for your love. your  
quiet, whispered prayers are keeping me afloat.  
    i dream of floating on prayers, whispered quietly  
    in silent rooms. you have never seen me as a little girl,  
only a girlish silence that sees your crowded rooms  
and dares to breach them with a dance.  
    i dance daringly into the breach and break  
    my legs under the weight of your gaze, sobbing because i cannot be your mother.  
your mother's gaze would have hated you. i picture her sobbing under the weight of your  
father's chill. your father's children don't talk anymore,  
    and i am freezing. my father's only child is loud  
    but only for herself and her mother. i thank my black GOD  
for my black mother, who saved herself from  
you. i thank GOD for her love.

**moving on // staying up**

I. moving on  
there is an impossible volume of childish misdemeanors  
and greater offenses, which we must live with daily. we  
hold knives to our best friends and curse even the enemies  
we don't know. i see no end to the sound. only a continual  
marching toward the next battle, a thoughtful recollection  
of heads and entrails, and a vow to keep more of us from  
falling in the next unlucky crash.

II. staying up  
i have never dreamed of satin slippers or crystal glasses. my  
thoughts tonight are of one million unknown faces whose  
mouths contort to form sounds that i do not comprehend. i  
cannot translate their language, but i know all too well the  
unified cadence of their voices. they fear loss. they fear the  
incalculable loss of lives, homes, and quiet serenity. in the  
dawning day, they may not wake up with me. a cold dinner  
and a warm bed are enough to make me happy here.

**long way home**

*to my mother*

my knees are already skinned and bleeding  
but i left the Vaseline at home with the band  
aids and my mother. she told me i should've  
packed some, but i just gave her one of those  
*you don't know me* looks. she's always right.  
i've got a book of sonnets in one hand and a  
black baby, baby, baby in the other. in the

corner of my eye shines an orange glass bottle,  
rolling down the dusty road. it passes us three:  
the book, the baby, and me. flaunts solar grace  
and glints dangerously, hoping to crack a sharp  
edge on a rock and scratch the soles of my feet.

it is my right to sing a tremulous duet with  
death. my right to take your heart and break  
it against the wall. my right to pursue bleak  
silence under the threat of love's stimulation.  
she never stopped calling. she never stopped  
caring about me. i feigned disinterest in God.  
she held me even closer. that's my phone now

ringing and it's my perfect mother calling. a  
thin, black, heated Madonna. Audrey made a  
messed up child. she forgives. never forgets me.  
i drop the devil's poetic lines and the little girl  
who isn't mine, and i run forward toward home.