

Kandace James

## **We Lock Ourselves in Her Room, Her Parents Will Be Home Soon**

She tells me,  
*This will bury us one day.*  
How a woman can love a woman in fragments.

She says,  
*The real danger of this world is women  
with bodies.*

My hunger salts her skin,  
my head on her chest.  
Can I build a house here?  
Will flies swarm  
the bodies we leave behind?  
Will our dust become the moons  
mothers pray to?

She replies,  
*This building will someday sink.*

She presses her hand between my thighs  
and some city in some state collapses.

## **An Awkward Greeting**

Darkness holds you up by the collar (or maybe darkness doesn't hold you by the collar). Maybe by the neck or maybe you're wearing a collarless shirt. Either way, the shirt is now wrinkled.

You were supposed to buy that lightweight iron with anti-drip technology when your clothes kept getting wet by the old one but you kept on putting it off. Here, while death's showing all

its teeth, would've been the perfect time to put an iron to your now crinkled shirt. Deaths' teeth are as white as you imagined it would be. By that I mean, you spend too many nights

imagining what deaths' teeth would look like or feel like (or maybe you don't spend too many nights imagining what deaths' teeth look or feel like). Maybe you pulled out the bat beneath

your bed, practiced swinging at the swallowed light. And isn't it your damn right, for God's sake, to drag the dead softly home? But so now what is death? Maybe death isn't darkness,

maybe it doesn't smile with all its teeth. Maybe it was never what you imagined. Maybe death is in the kitchen. Death is the frogs jumping out the singing pot (or maybe it isn't singing but

hums a little bit) and the water pops a hot, brimming hymn (or maybe it doesn't pop). Maybe it is a ballad but if it was, then maybe, you too will or so but either way, it burns the skin.

## **I Yell Back, Yes!**

My grandmother's teeth sit on the bathroom counter when she showers. My cousin's teeth grew in black. My cousin's teeth are gold. I have this thing for teeth, the lack of them I mean. How a body can fall apart. How I can hold a part of my body and it is no longer a part of my body. If I were a fairy, I would collect teeth too. I would sit in my tub and count them all. The more bones of strangers around my neck, the more human I feel. I rattle a handful of everyone's teeth together. I hear their lulling, screams, whispers all at once. One tooth cries, *Do you hate me?* I yell back, *Yes!* All the teeth laugh at this. I laugh too. *Do you hate me?* the same tooth cries. I spit, *I do not hate you, I hate your voice; it sounds like/feels like biting.* All at once, the teeth of everyone form into a giant centipede, curls up and rolls away. Even my own teeth leave me.

The rest of my bones miss my teeth very much, they wish I were nicer to them or at least had the chance to say goodbye. But what have my teeth done for me? They aren't real bones, they do not hold up the body. I stick my fingers in the wells of my gums where my teeth used to be. The wells ask, *Do you want to hear something funny?* I yell back, *Yes!* They say, *I don't remember when your teeth came in, but I remember when they left.* I ask, *Do you want to hear something even funnier?* They say, *Yes!* I say, *The funny thing is, I never had teeth in the first place.* They find this hilarious and the blood sloshes out of them and now the tub is filled with more blood than water. I tell them to stop laughing. They do not listen; how can a mouth listen? I will drown in my blood. Can you imagine me, bare, lying in a tub of blood, with no teeth, looking like a newborn baby?

## **The Flying Man**

Never seen a head so eager to detach  
from a body.  
Hanging

all the beauty in dangerous places.  
Everyone stands up  
with a hand over their heart.

A black body  
tossing above us.  
From down here, he had to be flying.

Most black bodies fly or at least attempt to.  
Eyes bulged;  
they wouldn't stop looking at the sky.

They shone white, even in darkness.  
That's when melanin lifts  
from his body that is no longer his body.

Someone snaps  
a picture.  
Isn't this godliness—

to watch black husk  
bleach like bones or moons I have yet to see;  
isn't this what we were meant to do?

Not wanting to ruin silence with words,  
I wash the hanging body,  
put him in clean shoes.

## **We Don't Pray Before We Eat**

There is a big tree  
with a hole in it; a hungry mouth.  
The tree rots  
in grandma's yard, eroding  
like rolling rock or a body.  
Grandma tells me  
all the things she buried  
next to it. Wonder if her treasures  
are entangled up in roots;  
concealed under buttered straws and black mud.

She takes handfuls of it.  
Looks like a face.  
I think it's my father, so I call the mud *father*.

Grandma smears it on my eyes.  
My tongue falls out and slithers  
into a pit at the foot of the oak.  
Grandma kisses my palms,  
places them on the stock of the tree.

That night, she tells me fireflies  
are the slaves who got away.  
I never see fireflies in winter,  
guess it is too white for them to stay.

I make myself into a stool.  
My sister stands on top and snaps  
four dangling sickles  
off the roof of the house.  
Mom says we should not eat them,  
so we wear them like horns  
and scare away the neighbor's cats.

When the ground is no longer white, it is green.  
Frogs sizzle on the concrete like mom's pancakes.  
Usually swollen, strange melons,  
now being scraped up by a boy with a stick.

I sprinkle salt on a snail,  
watch it squirm.  
Then I cry.

My father sniffs his nose up  
at the brown woman in the orange dress.  
My sister tells me if I sweep my feet,  
they will turn green and curl up to my ankles.  
(I do not sweep anymore.)

My friend dares me to pee in a bush.  
It rains so hard I think  
the whole house will melt into water  
and I will melt too.

I hold a worm with both hands.  
This is the day I realize  
not all living things have a face.  
I pull the worm apart slowly until it breaks  
clean in half.  
I do not cry.  
I watch my sister rock  
back and forth on a tire swing hanging  
over the swamp.

Something lives in the water.  
The swamp is a big hole— a hungry mouth.  
The neighborhood kids and I chase down lizards  
green as the olives mom eats.  
My hand is holding a tail.  
The lizard keeps running.

I show the tail to my grandma,  
ask her how it is still alive.  
She tells me stories of slaves  
who got their legs cut off for running away.