

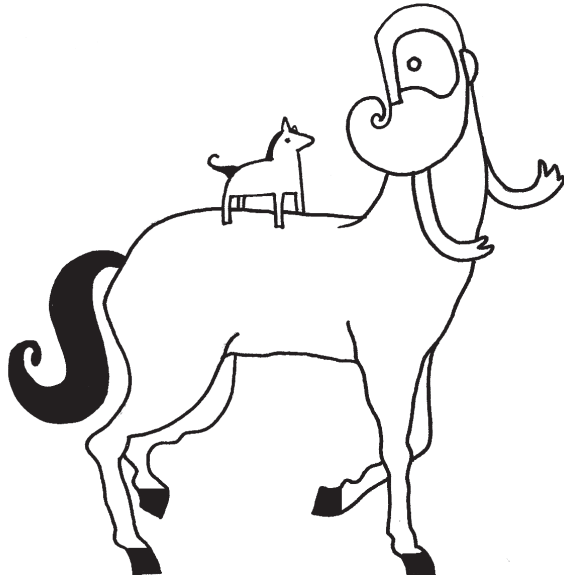
A pitchfork fell from the sky. It fell like a struck crow. It hit the earth and broke into large dust. A small boy took the broken pieces, their atoms murmuring, and in the dark swallowed them. The slivers dropped like lightning into his gut, scratching his throat on the way down. The boy sat on his knees before he went to bed. Trying to sleep, he tossed like a thundercloud. His organs grinding the piecemeal pitchfork into the pieces of himself, the bits of it moving through him, eeking out the sound of metal across bone and skin. The sky came in closer to listen to the song his body was making. He curled like an armadillo, arms wrapped around himself tight as a tomb, trying to both claw the song out of his belly and to protect it. Across the sky's shoulders he scraped his palms until he was too tired to bleed from them, his body so soft that everything hurt. On the other side of his life, the river moved like a dark instrument. A long cello wailing softly and longly, waiting for him to move his fingers through it.



ONE
We were horses



The black clouds and the stars
that danced between them, were a carnival.
And we were the kids born of it.



when I was sick

I bit down. Broke the thermometer in my mouth.
The mercury coated my stomach in silver. I swallowed a bird.
He pecked his songs across the metal of my silver belly.
The notes echoed through my throat and outside. He made
the beautiful things that flew out from me. But the melodies
twisted too much. They kept me up at night. So I climbed outside
and sat in a field. I watched the spiders, fat on rain water, crawl
over the wet grass, and filled a jar with them. Swallowed the jarful.
The bird swallowed them as well. Grew fat. Too fat to move.
Could only peck out one note. The same note. Incessant.
I couldn't sleep. I heard the bird's song like the ghost of a telegraph
rolling over and over inside of me, over and over and out of me.
He filled my walls with the chatter. So I swallowed a cat to eat
the bird.
He did, and then curled up to sleep. Now I had a cat dreaming in
my gut.
He rubbed his paws over my bones, sharpening them, thinking of
too many trees to climb, painting the hunt the taste the soft chitter
of the mouse. I began understanding the fabric of the sky, the gulp
of the night. The cat told me *God is concave. Blake was a burning
feather filled with the angelic light. What are you, a backyard deity?*

A small oven hell. He quoted to me the Russians--snuck the liquor in, got drunk till dawn. I've never read the Russians. That cat made my head hurt.

I coughed up his wet fur. I thought *I think I'm getting sick.* He didn't care.

He began painting the bodies of persimmons, spoke with an accent. He called for peacocks and pomegranates. *Peacocks! Pomegranates!* This cat's visions were making me nauseous. I started eating strawberries.

Gorged myself on them. I was trying to shove my whole body out. I filled the inside of me with the fruit, felt my organs being pushed out.

Throwing myself up through my fingernails, thrown through the knees

the neck, my teeth turning red. Nothing but strawberries. I felt the cat leave.

The heart leave. Both lungs, everything ever placed between the ribs and under my skin. All pushed out. Nothing but the strawberries. They ate me from the inside out. Left nothing. All of me became seeds,

my body sung in seeds. I filled the soft black earth with the song. The parts of me my parents put together were put back into the world.

The birds perching on the fence posts came and picked me up.

They held me in their beaks and fed me to their young, the eyes
still shut with skin, too blind to see what they were eating.

4 stars

there was a wasp nest on the back porch
it looked like dead honeycomb
outside
was a hornet's hive
I stuck my hand in there
the sun buzzed loudly
nothing could bite me
a caterpillar did
I climbed its tree
it kissed me with its back
its hair was sharp enough to leave four stars in my palm
the world spun through my hands
it had crashed into our street
so I picked it up
in the shed at the back of the backyard
I found a giant
he was sleeping
while he hummed I told him my dreams
then led him back into our yellow kitchen
I loved the smell of the air conditioner
there was one in the dining room

and one in my parents' bedroom
putting my face in front of the vents
made me feel like sunday
I could bike the whole square of the block in two minutes flat
Jalal
Put and Rue lived around the corner from us
there was a tree in front of their house
it was too big to be a birch
Samandar was only one fence hop away
his mother showed mine what God looked like
God smelled like my father
both their beards were black bears
me and mom went fishing in the park
I caught two catfish
and waited for them to die
they swam in circles inside the refrigerator
because I couldn't kill them
in Mississippi
we ate all three perch I had caught
the grasshoppers there?
they are big as an almond joy
my sister
had a pet rat
part of his ear was gone

his name was Pierre
I named my mouse after a favorite book
Charlotte's Web
she is buried under a white rock
the afternoon our dog died
my pops found his body hanging from the clothesline
I cried into my pillow
I was ten years old
I could fit under the house
my knees didn't care
neither did the dark
after the tub
the hallway from the bath's room to mine
was a black tunnel
breathing only to swallow me
I shivered and was more afraid of that walk
than anything ever since
even now
there are moments where it still shakes me
but there were times where the night
sat beside me on my bed
quietly
like it was a big man
who had to do what I told him to

he was too dumb
or he loved me too much
either way he had the same smile
I ain't never been stung by a bee before
not my whole life

from my window

the toads were heard every night
in the summer behind the house
mating by the thousands
the night sky loved this
would watch it happening
and winked slowly through the long months

we were horses

I was in a dream country. You were there.

And all those little blonde hairs that run up your legs
and over your shoulders.