Prescribed Meaning

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Available at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/laureate/vol16/iss1/12
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Something about your skin will be so smooth I will mistake it for glass
When you went upstairs I forgot where the icebox was and spent fifteen minutes holding
the stem of an empty glass
waiting for it to be full
I saw you in the reflection, isolating an emotion
Building a home around it
Giving it a proper resting place,
pillow under neck over bed between sheets
You ask me, how about you let go?
To set the glass down or wait
I twist my fingertips around the ridge and imagine all the people I could have been
I could see us both through the empty glass,
Transfixed on what was outside of it
We prescribed meaning to the absence of space
My hand grasping so loose it could have fallen
“We’re never really touching anything”
I mumbled I should pack up my things,
My sweaty palm fogging the glass
Maybe we should sightsee states over
Maybe we should grow fins and explore the ocean
Maybe we should tattoo our bodies with topographic maps
Maybe we should
The glass still empty and I froze
The mid-air head rush of watching something hit the floor
My mind broke into numerous pieces and I went for the shards
You said let’s call it a night
while I swallowed my tongue so many times it became an extension of my pride

Amber Slack

An Open Letter to the Father Who Was There

Did I ever tell you what
happened to all those
words that I needed you
to say in defense of
me? I swallowed them to
fuel angst rained on memories
like confetti at a parade
but they calcified, became
the weight in my chest, heavier
each time she burned me down
and you stayed silent. We have both
gone to bed with her poison wrapped
around our necks.

I learned quiet much
faster from your apparent
apathy than from her
pinching the soft skin
under my doll-like arms
until my body watered with
whispers of, “I’ll give you something
to cry about” through teeth pressed
together to flatten my emotions
until she could crush them in
her hands.

Don’t explain to me
about dosages and chemical
imbalance because I know what hatred
looks like in blue eyes just like you do.
If you’d ever paid attention you’d
know what betrayal looks like in
hazel. You have always been my
teacher by opposition, giving
me a voice that can separate
her atoms by never even trying
to use yours. We have both been
colored by her. Nothing rips
apart a child’s cheek like a diamond
ring applied with force but words
are what put me in therapy.

But we don’t talk about
the reasons because what