An Open Letter to the Father Who Was There

Amber Slack
Western Michigan University, amber.r.slack@wmich.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/laureate

Part of the Poetry Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/laureate/vol16/iss1/13

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by the Lee Honors College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Laureate by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.
Prescribed Meaning

Ali Orlandi

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,
Sharing 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,
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

An Open Letter to the Father Who Was There

Amber Slack

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 imbalances 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
1.

Sometimes I am more deer than person:
I walk through the woods, I see movement in camouflage,
I freeze, they laugh,
I stare,
my red heart bursts, you could be shot
My heart bursts again
I'm bleeding, I burst, I run away. Don't come back.

Does anybody care what I look like in a field? Does a person in a black cloak ruin a landscape?

The throbbing space between the stars, a bruise.
A cold lake in November,
black coffee, black squirrels, my eyes.
In the right light
anyone can look like a darkness.

II.

I sit on the edge of a collapsing concrete foundation staring at the lake,
a stubborn slab: all angles, all unforgiving.

The lake laps at it, don't touch me.
The foundation slips forward,
the lake whispers what it knows,
The foundation sinks lower,
the foundation kisses the lake and knows it is wrong,
and the lake swallows it.

The foundation loves on the lake's terms
very slowly, and then forever.

III.

Two snowy-eyed deer collide in a field, their hearts burst.
Two jittering specks blown across a sunlit cloud of goldenrod,
the first neon subtleties of fireflies.

Two hundred flickers of the moon
and a speckled child is born,
weak legged and drowsy;
it shivers in its mother’s slime.