

Evolution

Was it when I followed my father to the fields
his back hunched, searching for arrowheads
my feet sinking in the newly turned earth?
Or was it seeing my mother from the doorway
her back waning crescent in the dark?

Words came easily to me then,
alone with paper, my mind a sweet shadow,
time a soft blanket around my shoulders.
But coming out my mouth they choked
and stumbled, my face the crushed
color of cherries stuck
to the bottom of a boot.

When I told my father I was gay he was chopping
radishes, their red skins half moons
on the cutting board, little gleams of white
a promise worth keeping.
His careful hands slicing, their rough wintered edges
that held so many things: dogs, babies,
stones the color of starlight,
my wild heart, beating
the knife's calm rhythm, *What can I fix you to eat?*

My mother was not so easy,
her face pinched pale in the thick dark
of her bedroom, thin covers a moat
of righteous limbs and I the only sinner.
Even now, all these years later, my heart closes
when I hear her voice.

Today it's cold but the crocuses are coming up,
ochre pollen petals small as thimbles.
Soon the geese will head back north,
their black wings cutting through soundless cloud.