

Bruises

I still dream of the sound of your leather boots. I hear them fall in the hallway like the buckle of deer in the night.

Tonight, you came in through the garden, slid them off, placed them side by side against the door.

I didn't look up from my screen when you passed. Eyes closed I can trace your presence, the particular weight with which you move.

You stood at the sink, watching the kettle fill. Turning to hand me the steaming mug, you startled, "You walk like a ghost."

Old habits. I'm sorry.

Dad, the bottles are gone now; the stains, too. On that polyester couch we had to burn, its sour odour of vomit colliding with smoke in the wet fall afternoon. On the carpet, the shadows of her knuckles, spray cleaner scented, lemon and vodka. One day I might say that the bruises are gone.

I was five, and then I was twelve.

I don't know if you remember.

I don't know if you remember the sound of your palm, the pale crack of it. The nights you watched me, eyes flashing, as I stood in the December rain. The termination letters, ketchup-stained, face down and red-streaked in the garbage. The beat of your voice would rattle the slats in the walls, send the ice trembling in the glass in your hand. That was when you still used glasses.

Dad, you know how old I am now. You know your own name. You can know hers without the hiss of the can, the clap of the door, the midnight stumble. How did the spirits wash it clean?

Later, over pasta, you talked of yoga and growing basil. I watched you clear our bowls and rinse them until they shone. You were wordless now—cotton blue polo, graying hair. You whistled.

I hovered back in my seat, not yet ready to move. On the surface of my mug, an inverted sun spilled into the husks of trees.

The water shuddered as I drew away from the handle. My fingers were numb from the cold.