

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Kelly Grace Thomas: Three Poems

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Kelly Grace Thomas is a two-time Pushcart Prize nominee and 2016 Fellow for the Kenyon Review Young Writers Workshop. Kelly's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in the following journals: Sixth Finch, Muzzle, Rattle, PANK, decomP, Rust + Moth, Spry, Crab Creek Review and more. Her poem the "The Politics of Scent" was named a semifinalist for the Crab Creek Review Poetry Contest. Kelly also works to bring poetry to unserved youth as the Manager of Education and Pedagogy for Get Lit-Words Ignite. She lives Los Angeles and is working her debut novel Only 10,001. For more of her work, visit www.kellygracethomas.com

Daughter Be

jotted gospels

Be skin, transparent as an apology

Be wedding china. Be basement or bassinet

Be the pinch of prayers between shoulders

Be blanched in black blue of midnight

Be every ocean, emptying into drains

Be downstream a tuna laced in mercury

Be hook and bait and too much boat

Be part stomach, part swallow

Be the fireline or blanket

Be amazing grace/a hymn, a history, a hurt

Be a mother's grief Be the song singing empty

bedrooms to sleep Be forgetting

Be knowing the second story father built

another house, another woman

Be remembering

when the dinner table got bigger

Be long necked swans, turning black

against night sky

Be the exhale of ellipses Be holding open doors

Be hands or fingers that runs all this touch
 over the hungry
 hysteria of bones
 Be all this birth
 Be black lace
 Be blame and bloat
 Be born to this
 and let it breathe

Be anything with arms
 Be an altar made smoke

Told stay home
 Told pretty burn too bright,
 they call it arson

How My Mother (Almost) Died

Maybe it started with the cracking of her ribs, like the breaking of birdhouses made from popsicle sticks. There was anesthesia and surgical masks. There was a man in a white lab coat trying to bring her back. There were daughters from California, who sat next to her hospital bed like patient ferns, hoping to share their oxygen.

Or maybe it was the Christmas her eyes became frighten owls in a foreign forrest. Her hands shaky as windchimes. She had always loved the holidays, always decorated the house before our visit. She whispered *something's very wrong*, holding the undercooked turkey.

Or maybe it was when her handwriting changed. On the Valentine's card she sent me, I spotted the tremor in her g's, the fractures of her s's. She, a shattered alphabet. Maybe it was when she looked in the mirror and only saw her own mother's paper skin.

Or maybe it was at her father's funeral. Her lips a padlock, she placed in the coffin. A dying secret she palmed into a stiff, granite hand. A violin chord before the black veils and loose dirt.

Or maybe it started at her child's fifth birthday, with that third piece of cake. The colorful icing and sugared roses that never wilt. The way taste can lurk as understudy, practicing its lines for lonely lips.

Or maybe it was when her husband left. When he said, *it's over, no more*, as casually as one would say after finishing a meal. Leaving his two daughters silent at the dinner table. Leaving the knife still dirty on the plate.

Reasons I Haven't Done the Dishes

Because what can compete with a dying mother.
 Because that tide has been rising.

Because there are so many ways to be a glass of water.
Because people don't know how to say *I know this is hard*
when *this is hard* is hard to say.
Because no matter what mood I wore to dinner,
I need you to still be here.
Because I feel sorry for myself in bubble baths.
Because I've spent my life barking.
Because there are still wounds to lick that no one can hear.
Because I wonder how you miss me.
Because I live in Los Angeles where the coyotes are getting hit by cars.
Because the mountains are moving closer.
Because this soft, wet animal is something I'm not.
Because I am ugly and frightened at the watering hole.
Because I don't like asking to be fed.

(Author photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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