

Breathing

She became a fish the day the rain started. Lying in the tub, watching the water rise above her toes, she held the razorblade between her thumb and pointer, thinking of her wrists.

“That’s selfish,” she said, and instead put the razor to her throat.

Quickly, she opened her neck four times, twice on the left and twice on the right. It felt like opening an envelope. Submerging herself below the rising water, she felt it push against her blood, liquid fighting liquid. The white sound of the running water filled her ears and she couldn’t think of anything but bleeding. There was no pain.

“I guess it’s more about the act than the feeling,” she thought.

She stayed that way for a full minute before she noticed her lungs weren’t burning and that she didn’t feel as woozy as she expected.

“I’ve never held my breath this long,” she thought. “I don’t want to die from drowning.”

She sat up, the water rushing down her shoulders. Looking down into the tub, she couldn’t see any traces of red. She put her hand to her neck and felt the slits she made and looked at her palm. There was no blood.

“Why can’t I bleed?” she said.

When she sighed, she thought she felt air rush out of her neck. Putting her hand back to her throat, she breathed deeply in and out. Steady streams of air blew against her fingers. Just as she was deciding what to do, she heard her husband pull up in the driveway behind the house.

“He can’t know,” she said, and rushed out of the bathroom to put on a turtleneck.

“It’s raining hard,” he said at dinner.

“I like the rain,” she said, picking up her eighth glass of water and gulping it down.

“You’re thirsty.”

“I am,” she said, standing up to get herself more to drink.

“Do you know why my razorblade was on the floor in the bathroom?” he called into the kitchen.

“I was going to use it to shave my legs, but I couldn’t figure out how to put it on the handle. I must have dropped it.”

That night she woke up every ten minutes with a dry, burning sensation in her lungs and throat. She rushed to the bathroom each time and, using her hands, drank water from the faucet. Staring at her reflection in the mirror as she wiped the excess liquid from around her mouth, she could see the little slits on her neck opening and closing as she swallowed.

“I’m a fish,” she whispered, and sat down on the tile.

She remained there all night, listening to the rain pile on itself outside in between trips to the faucet.

The next morning, she climbed into bed just before her husband woke up to go to work. As she settled onto the mattress, she pulled the comforter up to her chin. He hadn’t noticed in the dark last night, but he might now. She heard him go through his daily routine of coffee, shower, iron, and dress. Just as she convinced herself he was about to leave, she felt a voice in her ear.

“See you tonight.”

After the back door closed and she heard the hum of his car fade away, she immediately got up and undressed. Her lungs were on fire, waterless for the past hour. Dizzy, she went to the bathroom and turned on the bath water, going to the sink to try and quench her thirst until the tub was full, at which point she quickly lowered herself in, dipping her entire body beneath the surface. The touch of water to her neck was numbing, exhilarating.

She stayed like that all day, alone and staring up through the clear bath water at the skylight, hearing the rain fall, the sound vibrating in the water and in her ears like tiny atomic bombs. She smiled to herself and wished the rain would fill the house so that she would never be thirsty again.

It filled the yard instead, creating a small lake that rose almost to the first step on the front porch. As she was getting dressed before her husband came home, she looked outside and decided she liked the muddy water of the flood much better than the clear water of the bathroom.

That night, in between trips to the sink, she woke up, startled. She dreamed that the rain had stopped and that the water receded. It was a horrible dream. Holding her breath, she listened intently for the sound of the rain. After a few moments, her ears adjusted and she could hear the thousands of tiny explosions on the rooftop. Looking over to see him sprawled on his side of the bed, one arm dangling over the side, she quietly stood up and walked to the living room window.

The water was covering the porch now, a good four feet of it covered the entire neighborhood. Opening the front door, she stepped outside, her feet and ankles

becoming immediately submerged. She took a few steps and leaned against the porch railing, by now completely soaked.

“What are you doing out there?”

She turned around to see him in the doorway.

“I couldn’t sleep,” she said, crossing the porch to just outside the door where he stood.

“We need to leave,” he said, “before this gets any worse.”

“I need to leave,” she said, showing him her neck, her four slits pulsing now, drinking in the rain.

And she did, walking into the waist-deep water in the yard and the street. She turned around once to see him still standing there, watching her from the doorway. With one faint twinge of regret, she dove into the flood, making her way upstream to the place she was always supposed to be.