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Category: Poetry

We Go On a Trip to Ghost Ranch, NM

You were the first one to bleed. We were in the desert,
that week when we were pretending to worship God
and sleeping in the same bed. You said *God*.
Look what you did to me when it came, my shirt
bunched in your fist. I said *Oh, so you're praying*
to me now? and eased circles into the scar
on your hand. But you wanted the others, stationed far
down the hall—past the bathroom full of swaying
and chanting and rooms of abandoned chairs that we would
never use. Down there they knew us, like the insects that eat
other insects and press their bodies up against
our windows. You liked that. Always knew you were a good
one to watch. We stayed there until we couldn't feel the heat
anymore, you drew legs into your chest with both arms tensed.

Legs drawn into my chest, you stopped me with an arm tensed
against my thigh. *Stop shaking* you said *it's distracting* you said
as we sat at our splintered picnic table and ate white bread
from the bag. It was early—the goats had just been set loose, sensed
us from across the field. We watched them graze at the door
of the church, chewing dust like it was the holy body. It would be days
before we saw them again. We'd be trudging through the haze
of another early morning, sharing a bottle of water and waiting for
that moment when we'd realize that we had made it
to the top. Your brother would be with us this time. He'd act like
a mother, stepping between us and the pack of goats stretched broader
than the canyon. We'd want to see the view, you with the grit
of a woman living by the blood calendar, ready to strike.
Cover your eyes, brother would say, *bare*. Those days drove us to water.

On the days when we drove to water
you always sat in the middle. No seatbelt
you braced yourself on the windshield, felt
everything like the womb again—not a daughter,
we waited for something else. Way in the back
they slept in the truck bed, wearing a tarp
instead of clothes. Metal sounded off—sharp
stop left the bodies to be attacked
by their own weight. You were still bleeding then
but the others had just started. Asked me
for a tampon but I was dry. *This is what*
it looks like to be lucky, you said again

and again until I thought it was my name. *See,*
you showed me, *it bleeds just like a cut*

You showed me the blood. Just like a cut
we left it to the open air, asked
the others to help with the clots. Tasked
with tampons, they showed us how to jut
them deep inside our bodies with our own fingers,
fist-deep. They told us about the first time
that it came out almost black, thick slime
that stained their legs and then lingered
for days after. You smiled like
you weren't afraid and then pulled me
to the side to ask if I would braid
your hair. While the others went and hiked
you sat on the concrete before me, three
strands all I needed to rein you in as you prayed.

Strands were all they needed to rein you in as you prayed.
We found ourselves at the church again, you with your face
to the stained glass window, watching for the goats. *What is this place?*
you asked me. *I could stay here forever.* That's when the men came out, a parade
with the basket, begging for you. It was hard for you to say *no*,
no to their faces, open like a palm—would have gone inside with anyone
willing to give you bread and wine. But I'd already won,
offering up a lock of your hair as compensation and telling them to *go*,
go. Just like the summers at the pool when an eleven year old boy
would splash you from the lap lane and say that he'd baptized you,
that you belonged to him now. I'd drag you underwater for
a conference of bubbles and frothing from the mouth. *Destroy*
him you would gurgle, hands at your throat. Would blow a kiss too,
before surfacing. I would stay and swallow water, taking in more.

After you surfaced, I stayed and swallowed water, taking in more
with every glass. *Drink* you said *it's good for fertility* you said. But I knew
that it was no use. We were set to go home the next day, blew
our week on goats and watching the church doors.
At lunch, you'd said you were thirsty, asked if you could
lick me—tongue out to see if I understood. We were under
the edge of a roof, leaned against a parsonage and listening for thunder
while we counted. *One mississippi* I offered good skin, good
and peeled by the sun *two mississippi* a river bed
sucked clean *three mississippi* all salt, no sweat *four*
mississippi you chewed on tongue like a cotton swab, unhurt
five we'd been left by the others *six* there was no lightning. Instead
seven you asked me *eight* about *nine* my body. Asked more.
Ten I was the last one to bleed. A flood in the desert.