

Bug camp. Age twelve. Mississippi: The Killing Jar

Ruby Davis

A girl told me how she pinned a beetle.
Placed it in a jar with a poison curled rag
and breached its abdomen, positioning it in a display case.
That night she heard a scratching noise:
the beetle's claws as it tried to scrape itself from its pin pricked coffin.

When I was at camp, I wanted a fire ant sting.
A burning bite to show toughness to the boy
who pretended he was going to shoot me,
the same boy who said that gay people were going to hell,
said 'queer' in tones that could crack an exoskeleton.
I never was bitten by a fire ant,
but had begun to shed my skin.

My parents had a girl small as a beetle.
A false daughter curling her hand around Daddy's finger,
an insect trying to crawl from the lie of a shell.
 How do I put non-binary into a jar?
 How do I pin it to the blanket wrapped around me?

I was held in mom's arms to the sound of cicadas,
buzzed into this world, lightning bugging the sky.
I've always been afraid of death--
a net that can't be avoided,
the crunch of heavy hiking boot,
the space between lying and not saying,
words left floating in killing jars.

Once, when I first began to realize myself,
I tapped secrets into notes on my phone
and hoped that if I died somehow, someone would find what I had written:
unsaid phrases flitting around my corpse
Because dying with secrets is dying more complete.

At my funeral, these words will buzz around the room:

Sister. Granddaughter. Young woman.

No one will use they/them pronouns in my eulogy.

No one can tell my story the way I can.

Try to put me in a jar, I will always wriggle underneath lid,
pull myself from pins and flap my brittle wings.

I suppose I've always been flying away.

The drive home from camp,
wanting to run from the car, leaving its metal shell behind me.
Born in the wrong body,
but it's not that simple.

I wonder if I could ever split myself from myself.

My parents thought they had a daughter

Maybe somewhere she's still here.

She breathes when I breathe,

turns her head along with mine to press our faces to glass.

I wonder if I will be able to one day reach beyond the car door,

to run into the trees and release her from her jar,

watch her scuttle away in the dark.

And leave me there, moon-washed, grinning,

something that doesn't need escaping from.

"Bug camp. Age twelve. Mississippi: The Killing Jar" by Ruby Davis – Oak Park and River Forest High School, Oak Park