

Morg-man

My name is a chore. A thick sock rustling into a boot
A rake lugged through the garage door. A task that eats at an afternoon
Manhood is a boot. A thick afternoon rustling under a rake
The name you call when you have a task to complete
Something in need of being finished

People love to pet name me. Whisk over the lawn
pluck out a new me and watch it crunch in their hands
Morgan gets translated to Mugu, or Momo or something
else you can pin to your wall and poke at when you're restless
Whatever you call me let it not be to work I have too my names

that mean effort. Some white boy calls me a girl and I think they mean,
"Why aren't you raking?" My father clamps my shoulder and calls me a man
and it sounds like a list of things I have to force myself to do in the morning
The only nickname me I accept is the one from my Nana: *Morg-man*
Something adult I've been branded as since I was a baby.

I escort my Nana across the parking lot and she gawks at how much
her Morg-man has grown since yesterday
I offer to help her into the car and she laughs
"I don't need your help for everything Morg-man"
We walk across the cemetery grass and she whispers

"I'll cry for Jamie too, Morg-man"
My Nana is the only person who can call me a man without me wincing
By this I mean she is the only person who sees that I'm tired
I wonder when men will let me stop working
Will stop adding leaves to the yard. I'm still

outside, and it's been cold but the bits of manhood
pushed into my ears tell me I will never do enough
to be worth calling back in
I still see men in the yard and they label themselves by the amount
of leaves they've wrestled into their tines

They bleed and they laugh and they are convinced
that they are the same thing. My Nana knows men
who won't stop working. Watch them get lugged
through the door and never return. She looks out her window
and watches them work themselves into dried leaves

She's watched family transform from a man to whiskey
To something without a name to call
I am done with names that demand sweat, Morg-man is the only name I need
Morg-man knows raking isn't about the muscle or the grip
It's about coming back inside to something warm on the table

I don't want to become a man that isn't kissing my Nana's forehead
Don't call me a man unless you're willing to keep the door open
My Nana calls me Morg-man and the leaves forget themselves
They pull themselves back into the trees. They wrap themselves
in their scarves and let themselves retreat home

My Nana calls me Morg-man and I remember there are homes
that are willing to let me rest. There's a masculinity that doesn't demand
of my back. That helps me take off my boots. That commands I take a blanket
That only wants her Morg-man warm
He's done enough for the day

"Morg-man" by Morgan Varnado – Oak Park River Forest High School, Oak Park