SOME SORT OF ODE TO THE GAY COUSIN

I.
the daydream starts like this
doesn’t it
you imagine yourself standing
climbing from your fold out chair
onto the card table pulled from a Ronald’s
basement
everyone will stop spooning gray turkey into their
suburb mouths and
turn
to gaze at you the way they did when
you were baptized
there’s a reason you only ever
eat bread at these things
with one foot in forgotten broccoli the other in
butter
hold up your hands in proclamation
the white Jesus on Aunt Sherri’s wall
mirroring you when the words
leave your lips and Aunt Mary’s eyes go
planetary
the card table will crack
in half
and send you tumbling
whether you leave in your father’s car or an ambulance
does not matter
as your tears leak into the
mashed potatoes spread about
your head like a halo
from your broken body say
you’re welcome for the salt
this way I never have to buy any of you
Christmas presents again

II.
you come out to your father once every year
an adrenaline junky ritual
the way your heart speeds after every missed
bullet he does cartwheels to avoid
you’ve come to enjoy the way he ducks just
so you can fly over his head again
your turn to be the projectile in this family
this is the kind of violence you learned to grow like
a sour root system and
you want to make him cry
  don’t you
  what kind of car ride home would it be if they all
cried

III.
  when your mother tells you that you are too young to know
  wreck her car
  pull up her tulip bulbs
  hang a sheet over every lamp and then take
  to them with the baseball bat meant for
  intruders
  clearly she wants a ghost
  in place of you
  give her a vengeful one

IV.
  another dream goes like this
  the next time your uncle
  calls anyone a fag
  scream
  your body is only a mouth now
  everything else is teeth
  you never loved him
  everyone just told you you
  should
  that’s what family is that
  is why everyone has left
  him

V.
  there is no god
  for you
  just your grandmothers and the
  white one would have needed you to go to church but
  maybe the brown one would have room for you
  like she did when you were four and
  your cousins were too afraid of the dark to sleep with you
  you don’t want love like your
  parents
  you want love like that
  no men or yelling just cooking shows and cowboy
  movies a hideaway game you don’t need to win this time
  it’s the only part you’re sure your father would
  understand
VI.
what happens when you are no longer the only
gay cousin
will your list of favorites reorder itself into those
you still have not forgiven for worrying
you might go to hell and the ones you want to hold
on Sundays
all Lindsay needed to do was be
braver than you
when she brings her girlfriend to Fourth of July
you know you will say nothing but
imagine if someone had said to you you
are not nothing here
imagine if you had known that all that time spent
trying to peel the you out of you
stung like lemon rind
didn’t it
so eat your quiet light and plain
hotdog bun filled with ketchup let it make you feel
smaller and stronger
long live the little gay ants of Catholicism
you and Lindsay and that great great great
uncle whose name you keep forgetting lived this long
kind of in the odd ways families do like
clinging vines and compost may you be fertile
soil for somebody someday
too

“Some Sort of Ode to the Gay Cousin” by Ivy Weston – Whitney M. Young Magnet High School, Chicago