

## 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**