

“girlhood after the storm” by Annie Wu, Chicago

girlhood after the storm

Silent is the storm, cold and sober
solemn and somber; that which clutches the
pearls of our youth in its limber fingers,
plucked fresh from the shells of our once-innocence.

A storm that is a woman with blue lips
and pliers to wrench us open and examine
our comfort— only to tear it from us,
to string us up around her neck and say that the flayed
open cadavers of girlhood can be beautiful.

A storm; a woman who must've seen our downy feathers and soft, fragile bone
birdlike yet still grounded, anchored to our homes and our unfettered faith.
she is the gale force wind that comes to push us out the tree
and the one that stares at our adolescence with dispassionate, empty eyes.
a nest, a once-home, fallen from its resting place.
Silent is the storm which learned to be this way.

She is a cruel teacher, one who has only ever taught the way she learned
quiet that crept into her mouth with the fever of infection;
an inflammatory wound that never healed clean.
never rid her of her quiet no matter how the water scalded,
how long she scrubbed.

Silence which likes to teach itself through generations,
where it was more comfortable to create likeness than
question the roots of our own reticence,
where it was easier to let scars grow over and over;
another veneer of tissue on another body
another part of some young girl's anguish.

Where the only ataraxia for our ancestors was the coffin and the hearse,
Sore is the storm that wreaks havoc on our poor souls
the youth and its water; our pearl and our shell, our home and our wings
Sore must be the storm that bound our sea and our sky together to tether us to land,
a lightning strike to hammer home her own trauma.

Each of our foremothers' griefs wrapped and tucked into the joints of our skeleton
heavy and haunting, clawing their own way back out our skin.

manifested as a rippling of new scar tissue; echoes of once-hurts.
Sore is the storm that got comfortable in the cycle
and all the women before her who found air only after their last breath;
Each small grief we commiserate with and each one we grow into.