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Holding Shallow Breaths in the Heart Cage

after Melissa Carroll

After the storm that turned limbs to crystals, we found
frozen the downy nestled
in a pot of dead daisies, color preserved,
eyes aimed to the oak in the distance.

Love is like this: a frozen state, a bird
waiting for thaw.

We found other things, too. The bone
of deer our dog dragged home
as an offering. The nose of a vole poking
from a hole in a stump. The loss of us.

Too long we freeze things
to keep, to hold, in hope that some day
the thaw will come.
But this is what moments do—

they wing by, a blur of time and color
that fades like an old film.
We could not take flight, but stayed
still through the silent storm.

Hurt is like this: a pointed shard in the ribs,
memory unshakable.

The melt will come—it always
does—and underneath the detritus of us,
a green that browns. But time, we hope,
will stitch whatever gap and give
again the possibility of bloom.
And then

the sting, a pinprick burn on the cheek,
heat spreading down chin neck chest
finally toes which curled hard in rubber shoes.
And then I cupped it and listened
to it buzz and bump against the walls
of my palm. And then the opened hand
like the bursting bloom of a lotus, I,
watching the jagged and drunk flight
of my brief love into the shadowed
jungle of irises. And then memory of my lips
that night, and hers, but a name lost
in some sidewalk crack. And then the first and only,
the way firsts dream back to us. And then she ran,
heat in her absence, and the familiar
scorch lingering throughout the day,
my life. And then the flood of others—
lips tongues teeth loss
—each containing its own beautiful hurt.

And then the last—oh princess, come
rescue me, my lips await, and wake me from my sleep
so deep, a dream of endless fields, a forever
yawn of green, wishing the next and then and then
and then...
Once I Drew a Maze with a Minotaur Waiting at the End

Once I whipped an apple on the ground
to mimic the end of the world, its splatter
oxidizing the concrete
in the shape of a fat Buddha.

Once I broke a bottle, blood blossoming
in the center of my palm like a harvest moon.
Trembling at the sight of it. Imagine licking
shards slicing the tongue.

Once I loved myself, but I find
love is a sour tasting
apple—all pucker—hurt
building at the core, and out scurry worms.

Once a squirrel plummeted
from a maple, and it shook
the daze out of its head, leaving
a lesson of stability.

Once I found the Minotaur and asked
whether it was best to be caught or lost
in a world of right angles. He said, mazes
are like this: one wall after another.