

AMERICAN HONEY

It's easier than you thought—leaving.
Only one night spent sleeping on your own
in a motel parking lot beneath the stars
of a summer Okolona. Your long-built dread
dispersing like gas into a brilliantly Black
Appalachian sky. For once, you are a girl

unmolested. You could do this: be a girl
without a home. Always gone. Always leaving
behind Strip Mall, U.S.A & the dark
green dumpster you raid for food, something to own
& the two kids no one cares for, the dread
that comes on when their father grips you. Sparkle,

let your freedom build slow like the death of a star
across the years. & when she calls for you—granddaughter
of Elvis, confederate flag bikini, voice you dread—
let the interstate's roar swallow her sound. In your leaving
you see your country for the first time. Your very own
seeing. When he howls for you, your body is a silent, Black

barn hidden in wild grass & your locs—pastoral, Black—
are ropes for him, swaying from its rafters. Dangling star.
It's easier than you imagined—leaving behind your own
mother. Her daughter, her ghost. Now you can be a girl
on the back patio with three white men & you can leave
with their money, egg suede cowboy hat adorning your dreads.

You've swallowed the mezcal worm of your fear.
Now you're standing in the cowboy's convertible, Black
wind at the edge of the camera's frame. You're leaving
with the get-away boy you found sparking
in a K-mart parking lot. You're keeping it alive—your girlhood,
the adrenaline, the novelty, the dying star you own

a million miles away. You're learning how to own
yourself, how to be 14-deep in a 12-seater without dread.
How to disarm. How to let it go when the white girl
from Florida says *nigga* again, how to be the only Black
girl among strangers. Dancing around a bonfire under the stars.
Singing out of the sunroof down the interstate. Leaving

each new town you meet & own a memory in. Leaving
behind your mother's dread-veined eyes. Fuse-less stars.
Learn it all, girl, until what you've left behind is a brilliant Black.

BLUE HEART BABY

Everyone wanna put hands on a piece of your life.
Look at it: how it sags in the eigengrau,

like the belly of a bitch heavy with litter.
No better than that meddlin-ass moon, full

as your own breast hanging low between buildings.
People hang from the ropes your heart has let down.

The chaos of stars feels up the dead air. Tiny blue flames
in the eye bone of the young-old junkie girl

follow you around the floor of your humming days &
have you seen yourself? *I think I am weak & without purpose,*

your father texts you from the kitchen, sauced up,
after he rolls his heavy body over the loaded pistol

he laid on your bed. *Get use to life.* Every piece
of advice is one the giver followed to his own

bitterness. You roll the heavy body of the car you loot
from your failed fiancé down the highway. Even

the wheel, wobbling with fury, insists on hanging on,
you must make it to each new mourning alive. Beyond

your silent mouth, what can you use to protect yourself?
The deceitful company of crowds will fail you, have you

out here with your young body, in the cold, a house
dress, barefoot on some other woman's back porch

where no one knows the address. Let it be,
if this moment is of use to your life. & how long

is a moment in time, indistinguishable as speed—
peep the ant-sized airplane creeping across the crescent.

How to wake up the next day & the next & not simply
after a decade? After 13 blue moons? Stretched belly &

empty veins? The gas of constellations run out. Heart weighted
low in the sky. Your chances scattered across the dead years.

MY FATHER TEACHES ME HOW TO DISAPPEAR

Tonight, we're standing on his porch
at the top of a hill. The darkness
up to our chins. The sky

a bowl of blinking lights above us. Perfect
for my father—a physicist,
an airplane mechanic, a veteran

of life—a Friday night fifth on his lips. A ritual:
it's been this way since I was a little girl:
he's doing the talking, I'm taking notes

on invisibility. *Before you*, he says,
from behind his telescope or binoculars,
your auntie'd be the one

doing the getting fucked up,
while we sat on the porch waiting
for the cool breeze. & he says

cool breeze like it's code
for something, a signal,
a blinking blue iris on the dashboard

of a parked van down the street.
He's foolin with the lens,
trying to get the focus right,

get his eye aligned
with a planet or person.
I was an operative back then.

Had a safe house over on Lakeview.
He's handing a Zig-Zag-wrapped joint
down to me, imparting secret lessons

I may catch, or not,
about being watched—
T said he'd see me home

those evenings—about being followed—
Said, he'd ride up on me
at St. Clair, see me turn the corner &

vanish—about getting away—*People used to*
talk about it when I was a boy, how
I was always hiding in plain sight.

Who were you hiding from?
I still want to know. But a question
isn't permitted during the test.

The test, always: what is true? /
what isn't? The answer
in the story

he is telling me. *It's all done*
with shadow, he is saying now,
eye to the scope. & I copy.

He means I better know
how to get gone.
When he looks up,

he best be talking to air.
& so, the next time he comes for me

THE PAYPHONE

Disappeared from the landscape.
Slick & black in the *Tangerine Diner*
Where I stood to speak into the handpiece
Greasy with other people's oil & spit.

Gone that day's newspaper, boot-printed,
The dog walking itself leash-in-mouth
Down the small avenue, the bookstore
Where I felt the train rumble past

On the other side of the wall. Gone
Those old men I watched smoke at their stools
& the bloodsucking bug I smeared in sweat
Until it was only blood. I am obsessed with

What's phantom: the younger self;
The angry & agile body, starved & able
To consume indiscriminately;
The gently-pumping vein.

The operator had everyone's number
At her fingertips back then. Who remembers
The sensation of the rotary dial whirring
Backward? Who of us keeps the record

Now? Outside of the gardens the smartphone
Missed my back pocket, smacked
The ground. Gone its face, diamonded
Into uselessness. No way to get ahold of

A way home. I hummed along while I waited
Across from the jukebox, in the booth
Ripped from its button, scratching
The back of my thigh. Gone the wild weeds

& honeysuckle air
That made me. The coin slipped
Into its dark slot

ALL THE MEN THAT SUMMER WHO SAID *I LOVE YOU*

After I made it out to the country,
the panic attacks came on

like minutes. Indiscernible.
Ceaselessly. The fence leaned

perpetually & the AC unit
droned on & on

in the window of the double-wide.
The mail planes passed overhead

like water from a hose—the most
I counted while out for a smoke was 13,

landing one behind the other.
Out there the world was steady,

untroubled, but my body
wouldn't let me believe.

Brandy's mother let me sit alone
in her jacuzzi for hours, comforted me

with rolled cigarettes & coffee,
a hymnal-heavy hand on the back.

Brandy came home with a bottle of Captain
every night after her shift at the Golden Corral

& sat with me under the tin roof
on the makeshift porch

while I confessed: How
that summer, after my fiancé followed me

through Chinatown for an hour yelling *It*
while I looked for the bus stop,

I'd pissed myself & rode the 14-hours
back to Kentucky, mildew & smoke

& How, once there, my father said *It*
while he rifled through my fiancé's abandoned car

looking for *evidence* & again he said *It*
while he was interrogating me

in drunken fits after finding
the name *Mohammed*

on the insurance cards & *Are you fraternizing*
with a foreign operative? over & over again

with a loaded pistol
between us on the kitchen table & How

I'd fled him, as I would an assailant,
ending up at Misty's—a woman

I waited tables with—
& How her husband

had looked at me desperately
as I was leaving & said *It: I love you*

& How he'd crept into the room
where I slept whispering *It*

while Misty was sound asleep
in the next, an empty balloon

lightly dusted, on the nightstand
& How there had been no panic

in my body then & then & then & then or then.