

INTRO TO THERAPY

The twenty-year-olds are horrified when I say
It turns out that therapy doesn't fix you,
it just gives you tools to cope with your brokenness.
This is too real for a Thursday, one tells me.
I say, *I know.* I don't say that had you asked me
at twenty which parent would win out, I would have bet
on my father. It was my mother that'd sent me
to the campus counseling center, the intro course
that taught me the vocabulary of each office
I'd encounter from then on out: the white noise
machine in the hallway, the watercolor paintings,
the box of Kleenex, the bottled water. Back then,
I thought therapy would be like a course of antibiotics:
I'd do the cycle and then I'd be fixed. Since then,
I've learned. I don't do workbooks. I need
you to be smarter than I am, or at least smarter
in a different way. Nothing I do is going to fix
my father or the person who lives inside his body
these days. Or, as my third and most gentle
therapist finally said, *Your father is an asshole.*
She wrote it down on a post-it note for me.
In therapy, I learned that I am both dumber
and smarter than I thought. That I never need
the Kleenex; I prefer to do my crying later, alone
and possibly drunk. I will always want to cancel
my appointment, but I won't. This is progress.
Because I am lucky, my file is mostly notes on my father:

a file in western New York, a file in Wisconsin,
a file in Michigan, a file in Georgia. We are the same
person we were at twenty and not at all the same.
My mother is the same person that enraged me
back at twenty and now we talk all the time.
She sends me pictures of herons and craft beer.
My father texts that surprise! he sold his house.
Didn't I know that he wanted something new?
No. I didn't know anything. Yes. I could tell.

CATALOGUE OF DAMAGES

All these years not knowing
the difference between mammoth

and mastodon: just another
human so proud in her indifference.

It's in the teeth: mammoth teeth
resemble the rubber sole of a snow boot—

mastodon teeth, jagged mountains
turned to granite after all these years.

Jefferson thought the west still crawled
with mastodons, sent Lewis & Clark to thin the herd.

All morning I've tried to reconcile
our ambition with the misery it brings:

what we set out to do & what disaster ensues.

Eleven foot at the shoulder, Max
is the largest mastodon in the west.

Jefferson owned Sally Hemings.
I never could make small talk with my father.

I told you this was a catalogue of damages.
Oh god, the mouth is such a weapon.

AMONG THE BONES

Another year without a baby,
another year spent bringing

home bones from the woods.
On my desk are dead things:

a jar of the dog's white fur
that the vet shaved to better

see the last needle in.
A porcupine skull rippled

with sutures. Oyster halves.
I spilled a glass of wine

on the sand dollar, but the next
morning, head throbbing,

I bleached it back to normal.
That first day shadowing

the paleontologist, I was afraid
to touch the ridged tooth

of mammoth. I used two
fingers, like I would a baby

whose skull hasn't set.

You're not going to hurt it,

said the paleontologist.

She was measuring a tusk.

*It survived fifteen thousand years
in a lake.* Among the bones

in that cool room, I felt
the weight of something

like geology. Drawers
and cabinets filled with pieces

of dead things. The jumble
of bison teeth. Ancient

horses so plentiful no one
bothers to catalog them.

After the vet left the house,
I plucked the puff of fur

from the trash, put it in a jar.
The advantage to dead things

is that you cannot hurt them
anymore. Instead, they hurt you,

over and over and over.
The fur in its jar, the skull

of a northern mockingbird—
the impossible lightness of grief.