

IN THE GYNECOLOGIST'S WAITING ROOM, FIVE YEARS AFTER EARLY MENOPAUSE

Emma Bolden

Here we women are sorted
according to our use. Some
of us are marvels, globes, worlds
whose wonder is making.
We are probed, processed. We are
herded in so needles can ask
their sharp questions: what lives
or dies inside of us, are we stasis
or spectacle, are we an acceptable
environment or a field of darks
through which no light bursts through?
I sit for four hours, back braced
by the back of a chair, unforgivingly
skeletal. Then the nurse hurries:
simply, she says, she forgot me. I apologize
for my expectations, for what
I know my body lacks. Even the butcher
paper laid across the examining
table wrinkles with disappointment.
Doctor, you look at me and I see
what you see: an equation
solved only by a zero, a waste
of time. Of flesh. Your shame

spills into the part of me that insists
that a zero is also a circle,
a line that curves to complete itself
no matter what the woman inside
is told she has to take.

REVIVAL

Emma Bolden

I wanted to become an expert on sadness and so licked
the light off the garden's latched gate. A midnight of owls

hollered *I know*. From a far wild in a window I'd watched
the magnolia go white and honey, it called for me. Child.

In this way I understood. I was done for, suckled by a dark
set of days. When the world ends, sister said, death comes

riding into town in the figure of a woman who cuts too fine,
twin-set breast-stretched, smoking them Marlboros down

to a man. I wasn't convinced but when I first saw a woman
move her body like a diamond throwing off every hand light

could throw at her my lips wet, whistle-doomed, and all of Mississippi
showed up in my doorway, pitchfork hearted, singing off the key

to sin is a body swamped by anything, if you let it in. When I slept
that night I dreamed a line of girls walking their white dresses

down to the river to wash and pray. Tell me, sister. How
they drank the whole holy down their pink and opened throats.

THE LIGHT MYSTERIES

Emma Bolden

Lord, the sky has teeth tonight
and I'm wondering how we can make
the decisions you gave us when we can't
remember to bring an umbrella unless

it's already raining. You can get used to
hanging, my grandmother said, but is it
a benefit to bear this kind of adaptability,
to live with the lightning smuggled inside

our smallest bones? I never know what
to say to the mornings, their bright coffees
and strong azaleas, their endless unfurlings
of a sun I know isn't endless in the way

I know and don't know that I am not endless.
Even the thrush has to live with the song You
shoved in its throat. Is there a word for this kind
of forgetting, which has its use as the only way

we can move through a day without screaming? Lord,
the sky makes the kind of light I can't help but hope
is part of the perpetual. I can't help but hope
we're all made for an ending we can't see to believe.