

Lauren Sanderson

HISTORY OF LAMBS

Make a pyre of the dead
garden. Say *beautiful*.

Say *burial*. Are you so sad
as to think that they rhyme?

Cut the wood, hew the wood,
fill the cistern with rainwater.

Say you'd kill for it:
something for better,

anything for worse,
bone of your bone,

swaddled in white. Break
the earthenware pots,

pick the funeral flowers,
burn incense

from thirty holy herbs.
Say *woman*.

Say *wife*. Are you so sad?
It takes years,

this business
of slaughter.

LAST DAYS HOME

Nothing grows: the gardens are locked,
the men sprout up around fence posts & finger
the links in the chain. Across the alleyway

a woman backhands the butt end of a cigarette,
goes on speaking softly to no one. City of steam angels
slipping through storm drains, & lines on the road

like veins on strained necks. In the alley a man
picks up a cigarette, coaxes a drag, buries it three feet away.
Somewhere the sound of mandolins.

RESURRECTION SONGS

Graceful they rise
from the garden,

& slow, & piece
by piece: a hip bone

in the tulips,
two eggshell breasts

in the mulch bed.
Then heads roll up

like dancers: neck-first,
smiling. *Barely deloved,*

one of them begins, *we pander
here today in holy patrimony.*

& then all the wives scream,
mouths full of soil.

& then all the wives play
dead in the creek.

& there is my mother,
in the middle & laughing.

Forgive them
their bleating,

they can't know
who they wake.

IN THE YARD

Forgive me like this:

sit under the dogwood
& let me comb your hair,

I want to see if I can see it
graying in my hands. Today

the tomatoes are perfect,
despite the bevy of quail

circling overhead, & here I am
trying to explain myself.

This is the part you find
funny, you & the dogwood both

bent in a laugh. Forgive me
like that: side-bent

& teary, with the perennials
returned to positions

you expected, & the dead bird
lifting its wing to the breeze,

& nothing moving such
that you wouldn't know.



APRIL

The house is quiet, whole days
of mute rain.

Light breaks in the stem
of a wine glass. Weeks

& weeks of this. We count
the onions, laugh

at the peace lily dying
on the sill. This is how

the days pass: through
blurry kitchen windows.

I say something about the coming
of geese. You know everything

about spring. All that's left
to fold are the bedsheets.

We gather the corners,
shake. A breeze the size

of a cicada's wing.
Cold, our thighs

are the same shade of red.
Even you confuse the names

of wild berries, sometimes
the songs of similar birds.

Once, you picked an onion
from the fruit bowl & bit it

like a plum. Remember?
The juice still dripped

down your chin. Who asked
these days to be gentle?

Of course, you want
the storm to storm.

Even you crave the kind
of rain that ruins hyacinths.

for Mom