



Abstract

“Origin Story” explores and interrogates the beginnings of a body, a consciousness, a life. What does it mean to be born and how does one go on living after the trauma of birth? This lyric sequence delves into the heart of the human condition, grappling with the body’s hunger, pleasure, and pain.

Keywords

Poetry, origin story, birth, living, the body

ORIGIN STORY

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ORIGIN STORY

The way out is through
a canal, dilated
and effaced to smoothen
your passage. Contractions
come in waves and pain
is how the body knows
it is a body. The way out
is an entrance, a gate
for delivery. Your mother
on a bed is a vessel.
Her work is to labor.
Glistening tools are arrayed
on a tray: razor,
forceps, clamp, scissors.
Your head is crowning
and you must wriggle,
you must push, you must
wrench yourself free
into the living. Into
living. This is the way
a breath begins
and continues. Nothing
follows. Forgive me.
This is the end
of the lesson. I am still
learning how to die.

ORIGIN STORY

birth	a separation
bone	scaffolding for skin / always at risk / of fracture
child	cocoon meant to be shed
distance	i left & couldn't find / my way back / couldn't tell the difference / between <i>there</i> and <i>here</i>
egg	a splinter of infinity
father	the camera's omniscient point of view
food	i opened / my mouth / i chewed / & chewed gristle / until i was full
home	see also: womb
memory	an elegy made of breadcrumbs / scattered on a trail
month	a tick / -tick-boom frame / of reference
mother (noun)	does it matter / if you are wire / or terry cloth
mother (verb)	to unstain / to thread / a needle / to pinch / salt / to wipe & scrub / to the point of gleaming
quiet	don't cry / don't play / with your food / don't disturb / papa when he's sleeping / don't stick / your dirty / little fingers / into your mouth
return	a prodigal attempt / see also: distance
voice	fugue that wants / to repeat what it wants
water	for example: amniotic fluid / something that breaks

ORIGIN STORY

1.

In the beginning, I was a shadow. I followed my mother, trailed her every step. The kitchen. The garden. The altar where she lit votive candles. I thought she would disappear if I lost sight of her for a second. I wasn't entirely wrong. One day, she hurried to a room and locked the door behind her. I felt a hot trickle down my face. I knocked and knocked but there was no answer.

2.

In the beginning, I looked at the sky. Sky bare-faced as the sea. Sky dolled up with cartoon clouds. Bruise of sky before the rain. The window was a keyhole. An aperture. Sometimes I thought of the sky as an uncertain oracle. It was going to be a good day if nothing blotted the sun. I saw what was possible and what could be possible, how the clear horizon would suddenly dim.

3.

In the beginning, I barely had words. What bubbled to the surface were sounds, a jumble of vowels and consonants. A cry was shorthand for hunger or pain. I listened and echoed what I heard. The train's doppler whistle. The daily rumor of birds. Syllables circulated in the air, each with its own shape and weight. I noticed how silence could be a backdrop, foreground, or empty space in the middle of a room. I tried to talk to it. My slippery tongue only betrayed me.

ORIGIN STORY

Spoiler alert: I have no
superpowers. My father
was silence who filled
the empty space on my tongue.
My mother, a wound.
I was given a name
similar to their own.
I echoed their hunger.
I played on a field
where a blade could be edge,
could be grass. I looked
at the waves erasing
the shore over and over.
I left. I folded myself
in the cold. I unzipped
my body. I got lost
in a blur of the train.
I turned my face against
the wind. I sloughed off
skin, felt how it meant
to be raw. I repeated
my name before the gaze
of a mirror. I ached.
I waited and waited
for my life to be changed.

ORIGIN STORY

Zero as origin, as terminus

As illusion, the synthesis of movement and
 zero as origin, as terminus
around which a double helix twists

A river of time riven, retrieved
 as illusion, the synthesis of movement and
 zero as origin, as terminus
 around which a double helix twists,
slips, turns, sparks what later becomes a gill,

History coded and replicated,
 a river of time riven, retrieved
 as illusion, the synthesis of movement and
 zero as origin, as terminus
 around which a double helix twists,
 slips, turns, sparks what later becomes a gill,
spine, feather, lungs, opposable thumb

Race in the manner of Zeno,
 history coded and replicated,
 a river of time riven, retrieved
 as illusion, the synthesis of movement and
 zero as origin, as terminus
 around which a double helix twists,
 slips, turns, sparks what later becomes a gill,
 spine, feather, lungs, opposable thumb,
the breathless urge to feed, flight, colonize

Branch apart, a trial and error
 race in the manner of Zeno,
 history coded and replicated,
 a river of time riven, retrieved
 as illusion, the synthesis of movement and
 zero as origin, as terminus

around which a double helix twists,
slips, turns, sparks what later becomes a gill,
spine, feather, lungs, opposable thumb,
the breathless urge to feed, flight, colonize
every surface of the earth, the air thick

More of a scrum where species converge,
branch apart, a trial and error
race in the manner of Zeno,
history coded and replicated,
a river of time riven, retrieved
as illusion, the synthesis of movement and
zero as origin, as terminus
around which a double helix twists,
slips, turns, sparks what later becomes a gill,
spine, feather, lungs, opposable thumb,
the breathless urge to feed, flight, colonize
every surface of the earth, the air thick
with wings, spores, city after city

Evolution unfolds less as unbroken lines,
more of a scrum where species converge,
branch apart, a trial and error
race in the manner of Zeno,
history coded and replicated,
a river of time riven, retrieved
as illusion, the synthesis of movement and
zero as origin, as terminus
around which a double helix twists,
slips, turns, sparks what later becomes a gill,
spine, feather, lungs, opposable thumb,
the breathless urge to feed, flight, colonize
every surface of the earth, the air thick
with wings, spores, city after city
multiplying, mutating as a virus.

ORIGIN STORY

When I say feed, I mean
hunger. The mouth latching
to a nipple. An index
finger scrolling through post
after post of the day's

viral tedium. When I say
feed, I mean the action
of putting fuel on something
that burns, just to keep
it burning. I mean

the world and the fire
in the world. The body's crude
metabolism of its little,
little wants. And when
I say feed, I mean nothing

and too much. How one closed
syllable can be a catch-all
for whatever it is my voice wants
to say. How one can be.
I mean I was born

toothless, with ten fingers.
Two eyes, two ears. A tongue.
Listen: feed me. I mean
I was born and nothing
has ever been enough.