

Naming by Mary Pinkoski

I do not know how these stories begin
or why they are so hard to tell,
or why they are almost impossible to name

I do know that they are easily confused
with the stories of those times
When strangers and friends turned the promises of their tongues
into backwards prayers
Let their words fall careless and loose
into the air like tornadoes
Until their meaning twisted against your skin
in a verbal snake bite

Words like fat, ugly, loser, lazy, failure become
An alphabet that bruised your body to the black betrayal of ink

I do not know when their words became your words
When their river of hate rushed into your throat
and settled onto the banks of your body
and you became something more than that the infinite possibility
you once believed you were

I do not know when that moment of saying "I hate onions" or "winter" or
"avocados" or "the sound of nails on chalkboard"
Became just as easy as saying "I hate myself"
Became just as easy as naming yourself something less
than you were named

I do not know when you peeled yourself back
Pulled yourself apart
Took the holy out of your being,
Until you became just a pair of arms, just a stomach, just a thigh,
just a mistake, just a space that is lacking
I do not know when your body became something less than it is
When it became this object
to toss around like a piece of garbage

What happened in that moment when you began
to write the poison of hate speech

into your own creation story
Did you feel the life go out of you?

And yet, did you know that no matter how many volumes of inadequacy you have
spoken into your body
Whispered into the recesses of your mind
Written into the suffocating air between you and your reflection

Did you know you cannot undo a miracle
You cannot erase the hallelujah under which you came into being
You cannot take back that amen after which you were first named
Gift, Blessing, Beloved

Did you know that in ancient times it was believed,
That if you named someone it would give you a power
That provided insight into deepest parts of that person

That you might be able to pull a light from the darkness
Hold a candle to their inner most being
That a part of you would be connected to a part of them

And so, in the spirit of joining together
In the tradition of naming,

There are people all around the world calling out
to you in the darkness
Beckoning those who have not yet found their way
out of a detailing a dictionary of hate speech toward themselves

These people, these lanterns of light,
these voices in the dark, they are calling you,
they are saying:

“Take this. Take my spine.
You firework,
you brilliant flash light.
Take this and swallow my stand up straight,
gulp down my resilience.
Take this gnarled trunk of tree spine
and let it ring with wisdom inside you.
You young warrior,
it is not that I don’t think you can do it
it is just that I don’t know how else to name you
without first giving you the story of myself.”



Someone

social media education every day

Naming

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