

Dear Audre:

It was my fault when the fox snatched our two chickens in the middle of a morning just like this one—warm and bird song soft. It was my fault that my revenge meant sending out our two young dogs, happy and dumb with freedom, out to catch a new playmate.

The sound of a warm, alive animal hitting the cold snout of a truck sounds exactly as you think it might—like two hands hitting the hood of that truck in perfect synchronicity. There is no longer a fox, not for miles; there is only my husky singing as if he did something bad, his apology wet and desperate, then smiling at the relief of me, who cannot run fast enough in the moss and bracken, my stubby legs churning and him, dragging his tender body toward me.

My love of the twisted rear leg, holding his head in my lap to the emergency vet an hour away, wondering if dogs' feet turn blue and purple and white when hungry for oxygen. I cannot blow on this like a burn.

That night he comes home, my husband and I take turns sharing the dog bed with him, the drugged hum of the husky becoming white noise. I think: *I am not angry at the fox, whose instincts include the terrible art of play, or at the dog for not listening when I called him, I am not even angry at me for my stupidity, but I am angry at the man who never came back to check, never once said he was sorry.*

I touch the pads of his feet, hoping for warmth because warmth means circulation, and in the coming weeks, you will see, those pads will slough off to make room for a new kind of callus.

Dear Audre:

On the way to school, my son asks me what April is known for. *Rain*, I say, *and first flowers, maybe*. But this morning the rain is turning to snow and the way I don't mistake snow from ash is that ash is wistful.

*Why so much rain?* he asks. *The clouds are calling back all that melted snow, I suppose*, I tell him.

Last night we burned paper in a stone pit; his wild morning hair still smells of the smoke. What I know about each: that they melt, that they can be forgotten on so many skins.

The last words on the radio before my son snaps it off are —*fresh bombs*. The reporters are looking at what is left of hospitals in Ukraine. We've watched them gather dust and rocket debris onto tarps and into trucks—will they bury their cities beneath the ground?

What I don't say: that the ash doesn't know any better, wants nothing to do with folding back into earth—instead, hungers for bright beacons in the sky.

Dear Audre:

The first thing I remember killing, the first with fur and pinked flesh, I drowned in a bucket in the garage. It was the tiniest of field mice, all head and white whiskers and had been snapped by the trap's jaw, paralyzed from the waist down. A flat-halfed mouse, big-eyed and too tired to be desperate, perhaps better off if I'd let it fade on the floor, but some story about a friend's bricking a mouse caught in a glue trap forced me to put out the light. I knew I could not bear to feel the crunch of its little skull against the concrete, see the welter of red blood and know by the stain, every day, what I did. I wanted, instead, to carry its body to the woods and offer it up to the hawks, the fox, the snap-jawed predators that slunk around our birches, thinking we might not notice them so close to the coop. I wanted to let the little thing be a part of a digestive system, to not be wasted. I thought of my grandmother had how she'd gently brush the crumbs from paper plates to use them again. No waste. The crumbs for her compost, the compost for her garden, her garden fat with beans and berries. My grandmother hunched in half in her last days, her body like a sheephook, and I'd follow her behind, my hands out to spot her, but she only went from one bedroom to another to another, like an animal in a zoo. She said to me she didn't understand how it was that she was still alive, she was so miserable. I looked to the lake, a bucket so big it could fill her.

Dear Audre:

Yesterday I bought my child a tortoise they named Apollo and today we are burning down the coop. It has been an arduous process. I don't mind finding the bodiless wing in the woods, still taut with sinew or the way each bird left behind a puff of feathers like a burst glitter balloon. I mean each shingle snapping in the fire pit, snarling back its orange tongue at the fox who is long gone, having run out of chickens. I wonder: do their jaws really flash, does their incisor twinkle?

Charlie brings Apollo out onto the lawn to watch. The sky is edging toward dark, and I want this done, want to not listen for the gentle *burr* of these tiny, hungry dinosaurs who no longer come when the door slides open. Apollo makes it to the edge of the woods before his human lugs him back like a palm-sized block of kindling. Loose again, he weathers the same path to the same unattainable goal.

I put another shingle on, not sure if the burning is even safe, but my husband is not home with his warnings, and I like how fast this chipped wood burns. It seethes green smoke, the kind the wicked witch arrived on.

Dear Audre:

Since the pandemic began, my daughter has been sleeping in her closet. She keeps the door open, folds her legs, and sets her alarm for midnight, when she knows my husband and I will be asleep, and she can slip into bed between us with little notice.

She draws images of pregnant foxes and their kits, dens and dens of them, colored pencil circles on their stomachs with miniature foxes, one ear folded over into a triangle. She is fascinated with mothers and mothering and can tell you about any habitat for any wild animal.

Maybe this was part of her diagnostic evaluation. Maybe it was her knobby language, spilled from her mother's mouth. We prodded at the edges of her being, trying to affix some definition to her habits. Sensory processing disorder, anxiety, autism, dyslexia. At a word's mention, I would skid through the library's doors and read my way through a label, dismissing and culling.

A disability is a set of stereotypes. She does not sit in a wheelchair but will only wear toe-socks. A disability is a set of experiences. She will only eat safe food. A disability is a sequence of paperwork. She will read past her bedtime.

She sleeps the same as she did when she was a baby: legs akimbo, kicking each sheet into a comma at her feet. We wake to the windows open, our flesh risen in the night.