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We as Bird & Branch // Things we remember years later in our dreams

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CHLOE FORSELL

We as Bird & Branch

I unwanted wings unfilled
and marrowless. You

hollowboned twisting
limbs and trunkrot,

echo from empty
ashen bark. Wasted days

wreathing into holes,
rooting in each other.

Wasted away, wanting
deadleaves or anything

closer to the ground.

Things we remember years later in our dreams

I.

As a child, I lived in a bathtub. Chipped porcelain printed leaf shapes in my thighs. I watched the prune tree out the window, imagined swinging like a fruit. Old wiring flickered a lightning storm on the ceiling. So much murk in the water it would've dirtied any body. Residue from an old flood painted murals on the walls. I could hear a voice, always, from the other room. *It is time to get out* and lukewarm. Baby's back, soap-scummed spine pressed to cold clay, pretended to drown. Branches swayed outside and a prune bruised the ground like the sound of ceramic on bone.

II.

For the first time, I bled but did not cry. I asked my mother about the body as bread, to first be kneaded, chewed, and torn, remade for tomorrow's meal. *Is there enough of me to fill the dinner table? Am I allowed to sip spiced wine?* More than worthy of a warm course through my body, I know now. Lavender oil soaked the pores of the house. My hands turned purple. There was always food, and I was never really hungry—too concerned with flesh.

III.

A lesson on wreckage: the living room full of dead things and decay under the sofa. I used to climb the walls to try to escape, but tired too quickly. I used to fall into bed from such a distance my heart would stop each night. I swallowed my own tongue and grew gills. Climbed back in the bathtub and swam away. The prune tree still stands. I see it through some stained glass window, sanctuary out of reach. The fruit hangs low and sways the same. Between my legs, leaf-shaped scars bud and branch. A bone breaks like dustclouds