

12-1-2023

I drop baby teeth // The day I learned to walk // Plaything

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Recommended Citation

Mancino, Kay (2023) "I drop baby teeth // The day I learned to walk // Plaything," *Gandy Dancer Archives*: Vol. 12: Iss. 1, Article 17.

Available at: <https://knight scholar.geneseo.edu/gandy-dancer/vol12/iss1/17>

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I drop baby teeth

the same way I lose friends
and lovers and children,
shut surface opens when
bitterness stretches out
my gums. Gross pieces replaced,
shifted, loosened, twisted,
yanked by a skinny string. Bodies
regrow when I sleep. Mothers
sink down to babies. Clauses
die, commas give birth
to things final.
It feels
final—
the holding, the drifting, the dying.
The feeling
 of a ghost resting
 beneath my tongue.

The day I learned to walk

He held out his palms
for me, waiting;
my tiny insect
fingers squirmed
inside a hot jar of honey
and pulled
at the saccharine.

He picked me up, dangled me by
my feet, shook all the sweetness
out of me. Knocked on hollow
baby bone with his knuckles.
Carved me open with the claws
of God's First Man starved of
fruit, shy & forbidden. Spat out
my seeds. Told me I was bitter.
I crawled all over. I crawled

to church and climbed
on the pews. I crawled
to my bed, bled out
on my mattress.
I crawled into the arms
of a woman who told me

I looked pretty
on the ground.

She slipped me new skin,
watched me crawl into it.
Spread herself open. Let
me creep inside. Wiped between
my legs with a warm towel.
Held my hips with the desperate
grip of Saint Jude. Gathered me
in. Swallowed my shame.

I take a step forward, like
newborn calf,
like wilted woman,
like shriveled fruit untouched
by the sun. She
weeps for my skinny
legs and my insect fingers.
She weeps for me with
her palms out. She opens
them wide. She shrinks
me to honey.

Plaything

We were once six, and then seven, and
then nineteen. We blink and
it's Christmas. Already, it's
snowing. Already, it's too frigid
to prance outside naked. We feel
the wind bite down
on the parts of ourselves we despise
but want so badly to love
that we bear them to each other
anyway. We stare into the reflections
of us that wear a different face
but weep all the same.

One year ago, I did not know him.

Ten years ago, I knew her so well.

I ask him what song he listens to
after he argues with his father and
she tells me she likes the private sound
of her own heartbeat best,
the rain piercing her skin,
the pricking of a sewing needle,
the harvesting of a home in her ribcage.

It calls to me, then, in a quiet voice,
it happened to me, too.

I hold my ear to his chest
and take in all the worship.