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STILL

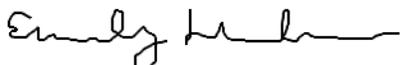
An honors paper submitted to the Department of English, Linguistics, and Communication
of the University of Mary Washington
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Departmental Honors

Emily Claire Humberson

April 2015

By signing your name below, you affirm that this work is the complete and final version of your paper submitted in partial fulfillment of a degree from the University of Mary Washington. You affirm the University of Mary Washington honor pledge: "I hereby declare upon my word of honor that I have neither given nor received unauthorized help on this work."

Emily Humberson



04/30/15

STILL

a collection of poems by
Emily Humberson

UMW ELC Honors Project 2015

Waiting For The Deer

One draws closer and I
can hear the softness,
the undulating of its breath-

Others thrum across
the fringing of leaves, winding
and unwinding the paths worn
by the horses-

The air grows thick
with their exhalations
and the mumbling
of their halved hooves
and then-

I'm at the edge of the woods
amidst the young pines
and the bloodroot,
the honeysuckle blossoms-

Remembering
only that I've forgotten- I
think of your touch,
like gossamer, and
the other places I might
never again visit.

Turning The Earth With Our Hands We Uncovered Bits Of Bone

We bought a twenty acre hay field
and on the first cutting built a horse farm,
strung steel wire between the fence-posts,
watched them haul the house in on wide-load trucks.

-

It didn't feel like long before there were
cobwebs latticing the rafters of the barn, ants trailing to
the pantry, the bench on the grave of my mother's mare
arriving and then thinning with dry-rot.

-

We laid coins on the lip of the train
tracks bordering the property and forgot them,
flattened among the thickets of alfalfa
and the broad trunks of trees.

-

When I'm falling asleep
100 miles away I know the train is there,
quickenning across the horizon,
the tree-limbs fracturing that light-polluted
stretch of sky. It grows lighter still.

The Harvest

We loosened dense pockets of earth, turning
bleached bones settled in the soil. Then the
planting, pressing seed and fence-post
and the cinderblock foundation of the house
into the warm dark. There was growth,
fractured limbs on the brush-heap,
the distance of my father. My mother nurtured
the pastures, culling the pokeweed, the purple
loosestrife, filling groundhog holes grown
threatening. Autumn brought an empty yield,
headless field mice left by the barn cats,
vacant chair atop the long neck of the kitchen
table. We waited for the solstice, rotation
of the fields for a new season, our discourse
with change perennial.

Fears Concerning My Mother's Eventual Death

grasping the reduction of body, her
body, housed in cedar box,
in bronze drum, in locket caught
at my throat

the scattering of her, sowing,
soft places in myself knotting,
her weight unraveling
from my hands

Thinning

water in cupped hands:
dream where I find her,
my mare, felled in the street

bleeding fast, the scent of warm
metal, I can do nothing
but take her head in my lap

and clench her mane and watch
as she flickers out of her eyes
and all the while she's growing smaller

and smaller until she is no bigger
than a foal and then I gather her
in my arms, carry her back to the barn

I remember what it meant to be
innocent, I know what happens to the stones
in the riverbed, to the oak of your front door

The Flood

the waters took the town,
set the whole of it adrift,

we let it dazzle us

after the first days of rain
the world was verdant

we could think only of softness,

seeing the breadth of the river,
tireless current

there are veils

of silt atop hardwood floors, heirloom
carafes brimmed with darkened water

as though there's translation to be unearthed

in the wreckage, I am gathering
books still swollen in their shelves

Hunting Season

I need more
to sustain me
than the muscled
casing of
bones. One of
the things my
father taught
my brother was
how to shoot
a rifle- how
to be alert, how
to jail the
animal in the
crosshairs, how to
exhale before
you pull the
trigger, how if
you turn your
eyes for a
moment, just like
that, you've lost
your shot. He said
he could teach
me too, but
I've learned
from him in
different ways, I
couldn't imagine
slicing into
anything's belly
that way, discarding
its warm, newly-
stilled heart.

Bloodline

My brother looks older
with his helmet dipped over his brow,
a microphone clipped to his workshirt.
I imagine his shoulders,
broad like our father's,
bearing the weight of a fire axe.

He shows me his hands, soot
worked under the fingernails.
I think of those hands slicking icing
off pieces of chocolate cake,
digging holes in the gravel driveway.

When I ask him, he tells me
the worst of it: a chasm that was once
a man's face, how he had to grope
through the pants-pockets
to fish out a driver's license.

I see our mother's softness
in his chestnut eyes
when he tells me about
the small morgue, the wall of drawers.

I don't tell him that
when we were children
my worst fear was
the he would die.

I don't ask him
why he does it
or why he drives too fast.
Our parents met firefighting.
I know it has less to do with
extinguishing flame and more to do
with running into a building on fire.

For My Father

Do you remember crying, picking gravel
stones out of my tattered knee with a pair of
tweezers do you consider my eyes,
reflections of yours, the way I wander
with you and my mother
joined still in the sequencing of my makeup
do you see her, your sister, when
you look at me, face buried
in a book. do you think of your mother living
alone in the house where she raised you,
next door to the vacant house of her mother, doilies
growing yellow on the dining room table, cutlery
stacked in the drawers what is it you think
when you think of loss, or is the past to you
a folded quilt, the pattern obscured do you think of the call
from your mother, the sound that opened from within
you, nothing like my mother has heard, when she said
they'd found her, your sister, some man's garage,
a garden hose and then a funeral are your hands
older than you remember, do they sift the
waters for something to seize

Of Witness

the hay fields are ancient,
empty of stories,
boxes of roots

they reach down
toward the dark,
toward stillness
someone once said
that memory
is a shoreless water

that there is nothing
new under the sun

there is something
to be said of these empty
hands, this old growth

how the land will outlast us