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Mandala

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Mandala

by Leigh Phillips

i.

I was eleven once
and owned by the seasons.
While filling up
the tractor back with slug-infested
orange and brown, I pounded
the leaf beds flat, raked
just as I was told,
I pounded dead leaves to mulch,
the ripened summer bare-backed,
beaten-how was I to know
my last fall as a child
could not be bagged, swept
into a sweatshirt, or bundled
into a pink anorak, like those
angels in the snow.

ii.

Then there was winter.
No two alike, but in memory
those flakes drone.
I never wanted them, days
circumventing their hours,
their groove, their moments
like mitosis. It was all I could see.

Foot by foot by foot
buried, "a roof can withstand
only so much weight," dad repeats
anxiously, looking out the window.

94 Harpur

Meanwhile, an auxiliary is waging
war in my abdomen, awakened
by the release of a hormone,
drop of an egg.

I do not know this, bored
with the slow rumbling of plows,
the dispersing ache. I regress, replace

the tired anthem on the turntable
and pirouette, dance the spiral
snowflake dance,
rot my dulcet tones, *you are my sunshine*.
Age spreads like fungus, it clings and sings.
I grow chilled by the blandness my voice brings.
The parents don't notice the stain on my pants,
croon for an encore, saying
"such a talent in that child!"
but there is nothing avant-garde
about being in limbo.

iii.

I etch on frosted windowpanes
the story of my creation:
mother says she died until divorce.
When she was no longer perfect,
myth was, he set her free.
I wonder what happens when
I prove the value of my shallow breasts
and the slow stream tracing
each inner thigh. Will I be divorced?
Exiled like Ovid, or tried as Socrates?
I think I'd die a hemophiliac
if I weren't in love with certain scars

Leigh Phillips

created before my birth, though
mom says I grew into them nicely.
Dysfunction is not a dress.
“Nothing will ever grow in *me*.”

iv.

I was fourteen then,
when distrust bloomed
in the throat, as if I were Chloris.
I wretched out roses
to the tune of romantic ditties,
closed the window on Zephyr’s
wanton whisper, and haven’t opened
my tight-lipped service since.
I’m twenty-one now,
a hybrid of the ages.
I’m twenty-one now,
ten when I started growing.
I haven’t stopped, and will
not commit to bandages,
the clotting veil and train.

At twenty-six I’m supposed
to be garnished, ready to serve
a child’s hungry suckle; but will not
become pretty calendar poses
of seasons and cycles, though I make
no effort to comb leaves off my shirtsleeves:
their hugging veins cannot breathe or bleed.
Shaking flakes off my bodice,
I will not be a carrier.
I, like ground, have taken on too much water.