

***On sin: wrath***

By Reina Makimura

i.

he's always been good,  
at throwing punches that land  
in the shapes of bruises  
on sandbags and plastic  
play-pretend armor.

she was always behind him,  
another part of the sea of red  
that he sees in the corner of his eyes -

that hangs on her,  
that red,  
the heavy pull of every  
punch he ever threw  
towards the targets, painted  
their bruise-colored blue.

when the jail bars stand  
firm and tall, like that grand  
old flag that flies above the pride  
of their home and the secrets  
hidden between stripes of white,  
there is something more than  
punishment.  
there's -

shame?  
sorrow?  
simple emotion?

something they all feel.

it's the emotions that consume them.  
it's what makes the world spin 'round  
and around and around  
spinning like a top  
into a fishing net built  
around the universe.

it'll be the end of them all,

all that beating red -  
lungs filled with diamonds  
and hearts made of gold.

she was dipped in silver,  
hardened and grown,  
flowers that grow  
inside the jail cell walls  
and the end of her world.

ii.  
it began with flowers.

she was the girl at the edge  
of the playground, just on the verge  
of falling into the next door neighbor's yard.  
her book of fairytales was hidden  
underneath the big oak tree,  
pages pressed between clovers  
and leaves adorning the cover.

he was the one on the blacktop,  
the one who threw tennis balls  
at the walls and bounced off  
of bricks only to leave behind  
dried specks of blood  
from skinned knees and palms.

they used to have races,  
from school doors to soccer goals.  
he was always the fastest,  
no matter the push and pull  
of the crowd and the girl  
who ran around them.

she would run straight  
to the end of the yard,  
to the farthest boundary,  
pushing away the threat of punishment.  
she ran  
with the wind biting bee stings on her ankles  
but the cold grip threaded through her hair,  
silver blooded needles in dresses,

but it was the pinch of a missed note,  
and it meant nothing.

elementary school races  
were olympic in size  
and he would run with her,  
their hands barely by their sides.  
he chased her  
like he was the wind and she,  
she was the rain, and they collapsed  
in flowers, laughing in a sea of red  
pansies and petunias and petals  
of other fallen trees.

it began with flowers in a school yard,  
and it ended with flowers on a headstone.  
but in the middle it was all red,  
beaten blood and broken bone,  
laughing through the rain,  
and running from the wind.

iii.  
when you are young,  
innocence has corrupted you.

i hadn't yet taken hold  
of a newborn baby girl  
but by the time she has borne  
a second child with hair of gold  
she is only bitter about  
the loss of the fire in her eyes  
and the weakness in her soul.

and that bitterness,  
that anger,  
that painful love,  
all that emotion,  
will only ever boil over  
and burn.

everyone forgets to wear sunblock  
especially when there's no sun  
that anyone can see.

when you are young,  
you do not expect to grow up.

iv.

they began in the flowers,  
the petals blooming around them,  
springtime came early  
for two young souls  
who don't yet know  
everything they could be.

"what do you want to be when you grow up?"

"i want to be  
an astronaut.  
a fireman.  
the president.  
the pope."

they grew up among flowers,  
the kind that shrivel when they get old,  
as if the way they dreamt  
in comparison to what they will be  
has taken away the color of the world.

eventually they held hands,  
fingers intertwining like vines  
growing between the rings of a fence.

she smiled,  
and so did he.  
they raced like the rain  
running down a window -  
their time is running quick,  
but for now they will just be.

(her hand will grow into the metal,  
her skin will rust and her fingers will bleed,  
another part of the yard,  
another piece of the machine.

but it is warm there,  
in his eternal embrace,  
underneath trees of oak

and flowers as delicate as lace.)

and now,  
they smile, baby soft skin shifting,  
and they hold each other,  
a fairytale within a fairytale,  
elementary school races  
bringing them to the olympics.

before the sun was to rise,  
they were clinging to the fence,  
eternity hidden between their eyes.  
they searched for youth  
and they searched for the future,  
and she found it in his arms,  
and he found it in her love.

they grew up, skin no longer baby soft  
but caked with makeup  
and broken with high school shaped scars.  
but life tastes so much better  
once it's been lived,  
and skin is so much cleaner  
when there are no sins to speak.

we all want heaven,  
but by their age,  
it's too pure to touch.

it would burn.

v.

*a blink -*

happiness  
is quick and short  
and powerful,  
like a flame of freedom,  
it gives you something  
to live for,  
even when  
it lasts for

a bare  
second  
in the blink  
of god's all seeing eye.

vi.

humans are bubbling with feeling,  
spilling over in emotion,  
always on the edge  
of something, whether it be breaking  
or bending or building,  
there is always  
a volcano of feeling.

you flow over in drops,  
slow and simple,  
a rainfall of careless  
feeling.

you're so careless  
with your feelings.

you just

*feel* them.

no doubt about it,  
i admire that.

the way it doesn't matter  
whether it is kind,  
there is always something  
in the back of your mind.

there's imagination and creation,  
a simple nation of impatience,  
you're born and grown into patients  
but you don't care because the journey  
is more important than the destination.  
it's fascinating, that you can feel  
wonder, you simply do.

is it a blessing,  
that you can't control  
the pattern of your heartbeat?

you put emotion before intelligent notion  
causing calamity and commotion  
but it's okay, it's just  
*human.*

what is that like?  
to always be losing,  
losing, losing, losing  
control?

is this why  
the sins  
are stronger  
than the sinner?  
why the man  
who feels only  
temptation  
will never  
hold back?

there is calm,  
and then the ocean  
is in uproar,  
that still  
before the storm,  
the eye  
in the cat's  
cradle and claw.  
then,  
there is feeling,  
and still clear glass  
becomes  
love  
(all color,  
all energy,  
all trust,  
all safety)  
and there is no absence  
of anything.

is it a blessing,  
my dear angel,  
to have fallen to earth?

when you feel,  
without control,  
is it a blessing  
to know it's real,  
or is it a curse  
to be unsure  
if it will not  
destroy?

vii.  
the thing about fire  
is that it always means anger.  
    (fire may be fear, for me  
    the way it burns without reality  
    and there's no stopping it  
    when they're afraid she  
    might leave)

i always wondered about that,  
because fire doesn't burn like anger,  
it burns away the things  
that stain  
and it lets them begin again.  
it is not forgiving  
but it is not against giving.

anger is -  
                    a drop of the salt ocean?

it corrodes slowly,  
breaks humanly  
and shatters you.

it is not quick and fast,  
it builds up,  
and you don't realize  
you're about to drown  
until your words scream for air  
and they flow with no control.

one cannot stop a flood  
from surrounding you

the second before you breathe.

one cannot stop the ocean  
from flooding  
the whole damn world.

viii.

they spent the first few years  
studying and hoping  
that things would get better.  
they dreamed together,  
their fingers intertwined,  
their futures like smoke,  
tangled and loose and empty,  
but still  
there.

he is warm,  
and he holds her,  
(just a little too tight)  
and they study for exams  
and scream silently at night.

she won't talk to him,  
about the fear  
that boy in her class  
makes her feel,  
(he touched another girl,  
and the university  
was blind to their reality.)

she is afraid,  
but she also carries the weight  
of how he might make him pay.  
she won't forget the bruises  
that remain  
inside a punching bag's brain.

(he would kill him,  
for hurting her,  
he would burn down the world,  
for reaching towards her bones.)

for the first few years, they dream.  
and she has nightmares about fire  
and he lights cigarettes where they sleep.  
still they don't let go,  
but they can't find a home  
that's fireproof  
with built-in smoke.

ix.  
she liked to pretend she was happy,  
growing old with his arm on hers.

she liked to fake being quiet,  
living with the scent of cigarettes.

she liked to pretend she was happy,  
with the bruises bitten on her neck.

she liked to fake being quiet,  
always the surly and stuck up princess  
with fairy boats made out of bottle necks.

she liked to pretend she was happy,  
and god, she did a good job.

it's like i said.  
water corrodes  
slow.

thing is, that doesn't mean  
that there isn't a breaking point.

*AND NOW,  
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,  
THE ACTORS BEGIN  
TO TAKE OFF THEIR MASKS  
AND REVEAL -*

x.  
there was a night

*(it was dark,  
and the sidewalk was cold  
and the callouses*

*under her feet burned)*

and he was home,  
and he was alone,  
and she had a city  
built to roam.

*"oh pretty girl,"  
he murmured,  
"i'll burn down  
your whole world."*

*she smiled and  
she didn't look away.  
"and then, honey,  
i'll step on the ashes."*

she was a lion,  
bars on cage on high  
broken and bent and *she leaped* -

but she would never touch the sky.

he was alone,  
and the sky was dark.  
there was a fire building, with  
j u s t o n e

s p a r k .

xi.  
she crawled through the window  
like they were kids again,  
hiding from villains and parents and pirates,  
doing all they could  
to keep hold of each other's hands.

the room was smokey,  
she knew before she entered,  
anyone could tell, with the clouds  
on the rusted bricks.

he asked where she's been,  
the cigarette's shadow curled under his lip.

*none of your business*  
on repeat, a broken cd,  
two kids too scared to go and live.

but he reads her like a map,  
a world of braille under his fingers,  
he touches her and melts her,  
and the smell of his old love lingers.

maybe if she says  
*none of your business*  
enough,  
he'll forget  
to care.

he doesn't.

*i love you*  
*and it's a whisper,*  
*more of a splinter*  
*in my eye,*  
*more of the apple*  
*choking*  
*my throat.*

haven't you ever wanted  
your childhood sweetheart  
to love you back with that sweet heart?

she wasn't scared,  
she was high on blood  
and kisses tipped with danger.

he reaches out to touch her,  
and there's a spark  
of electricity between  
them and their lies.  
there's a punching bag  
as invisible as i feel,  
something otherworldly  
that oh god, they will never see.

their voices rise like little white birds,

broken and flying and struggling  
to land.  
she is a crescendo and she will not stop  
rising, smoke let free,  
they're meant to be,  
he wants her to be his,  
she promised that she was his,  
she promised on little white flowers  
like fairy wings  
and they and their promises were so delicate,  
like her shirt's fabric between his fingers  
and a pinch and a kiss  
and a punch and he can taste the lust  
that lingered on that other boy's breath  
and it burns him, like holy water.

they both reach for the gun,  
pull the trigger and run,  
write quick, write fast,  
shoot 'em with everything you have,  
throw words like daggers  
and hold them in your fist -

and here  
it is.

*he*  
***hits***  
*her.*

xii.  
every time  
this happens,  
every  
cataclysmic  
night,  
i am here  
and i regret  
my existence.  
and i *f e e l*,  
for the only time  
i ever will,  
an anger meant

to destroy,  
but humanity never will  
let me take them  
and end this sin -  
they always  
resist.

so instead  
i watch  
and i cry  
for all the broken things  
that live  
and persist  
within  
my grip.

xiii.  
the only sound  
is silence.

xiv.  
there is nothing to say.  
is there?  
she flinches away.

there is nothing more to say.

xv.  
he whispers something to the stars.  
she burns,  
and the sun cries.  
he tries to hold her  
while she shakes  
but her bruise pushes him away.

xvi.  
he holds on to her  
and his hands burn from the rope  
around her neck.

xvii.  
and then she touches him  
and he heals.

(she does not.)

xviii.

"hi," she whispers.  
the bruise below her eye  
speaks for her,  
more than any word could.

"i'm sorry," he murmurs  
and it is in his every breath  
and it will be in every death.

they sit across from each other,  
both ready to burn and ready to run.  
they are cross-legged,  
rope tangled into pieces  
that the ocean has made into one.  
they are welded through water and sun  
and they can't break  
no matter how hard they try.

he is burning with regret,  
and she is dripping fire.

she sleeps easy that night.

xix.

when they were young  
she liked to braid his hair  
and she would always pull too hard  
because she had never seen a boy cry  
and god, she was eager to try.

xx.

he sings apologies  
like little birds of a feather  
nesting in his soul.  
she whispers her "sorrys"  
while he's asleep  
because she cheated  
but he will never know.

but the other boy lingers on her

and he kisses her  
in her dreams  
and he tastes like sea  
while she's asleep.

but when she wakes  
she feels only  
the cold heat  
of hate.

she touches the  
grinning metal  
that burns them apart,  
welding a distance  
through their hearts,  
and she knows it's a weapon,  
hers to hold,  
and she knows she could hurt him,  
he's hers to control.

fear leads to anger  
and anger leads to hate  
and hate leads  
to death.

to me.

to this.

(and she has always been  
a fire  
he can't drink.)

(and he has always been  
a fire  
she can't control.)

xxi.  
the knife is a mirror,  
and it reflects  
what she thinks  
is a warrior,  
but is only a girl.

it is ice in her hands,  
freezing her veins.

(one cannot be human  
with all their feelings,  
when their hands are to be stained  
with someone's loved one's blood.)

xxii.

*hehitmehehitmehehitmehehitme*

it is on replay, a broken tv remote  
or a robot, wires snapped and crossed  
the red one stained in jesus' blood.

*hehitmehehitmehehitmehehitme*

he deserves it.

a silver necklace hangs from her neck  
and her hair drops beside her cheek  
as she leans over him, lips red  
like a sunset.

a bruise is the only makeup she wears  
and it coats her eyes  
in layers of shadow and brings  
the gods down to size.

there is something wrong in her mind,  
something broken and angry and twisted,  
the same as her wrists  
were in that fence so long ago.  
the tree has grown into her  
but now she holds a chainsaw  
and it will fall  
or they will break.

he loved her.  
she loved him.

he held her  
as tightly  
as he was  
the past.

he loved her.  
she let him.

*hehitmehehitmehehitmehehitme*

but no more.

xxiii.

he slept;  
she knelt  
next to him  
like she was praying.

he worships her  
and she turns him over  
and the knife kisses him  
with more meaning  
than she did.

she has always bathed in the red,  
loved it, grown in it,  
watched it  
in the corner of her eye  
like a sea  
now parting  
in their final parting.

there's a fine line between innocence  
and anger  
and wrath  
and death.

and she has crossed it  
in the way that humanity  
is not meant to take lives  
from each other unnaturally.

metal touches his throat  
and murder she wrote.

revenge tastes as sweet  
as she expected.

xxiv.

pretty darling flower,

locked away at night,  
oh baby child,  
what are you doing tonight?

*i'm running from the cars  
red, blue, and white.  
i'm hitting all the pavement  
on this long run from the fight.*

oh my darling girl of fire,  
a breath could take away your light.  
come to my hands,  
see your eyes in a gold shining badge,  
i'll keep you safe  
in a jail cell tonight.

xxv.  
she sent the grave flowers.  
they dried in the same color  
as his final breath when he died.

xxvi.  
let it build up  
and it will corrupt  
all of you.

i am wrath.

(of sin, of hell,  
of humanity.)

and i will watch  
as the world burns  
while you murder  
your anger,  
in fruitless efforts  
to drain a forest  
of water.

sometimes letting go  
doesn't burn as much  
as holding on  
to a charcoal love.

i will tell the same story  
of him and her and the rope  
again and again,  
and i will always  
prevail.