



BREAKING

My body was still without shape in third grade
and I ached to carry a ball the way he did, tossing
sixth-graders off his haunches like loose earth, galloping
for touchdown after touchdown and neighing loudly.

We shot hoops at the abandoned gym
in fifth grade, returning home
with dust matted in our manes, stuck
to our skin, our spit dark-brown.

His fingers were ferocious, always snapping
at me, so I never took a shot or spoke,
instead spent the night feeding him
the ball, tallying my assists. Each basket
the rim swallowed like a sugar cube.

Shot after shot, finally he named me
friend, and all evening I shivered
when we brushed bodies, when he pressed
me on his way to the rim, when he placed
the bridle gently in my mouth.

Tenth grade, I thought I broke
free from him, shooting
across the middle of the field
following a well-thrown spiral.
When my feet lifted from the
ground and the ball grazed my palms

he approached abruptly from behind,
dove through my knees, and spun me
like a hay bale onto my collarbone
which popped, a distant gunshot.

I quit team sports our senior year
choosing instead to run
long-distance. Father grounded
me indefinitely, and called him
to save me from myself,

but when he approached this time
I did not flinch. When he moved
towards me, when we touched, I shook
him off and began to gallop.

MOTHER

Faith still rooted
though trunk split
twice by lightning.

*Six brothers remain and one
sister, you say. My children
but one, both parents,*

*and my husband still
alive. And this tree, look at this
tree, even now growing.*

WHAT WE DO FOR FUN AROUND HERE #1

We could hike the mile
over to the junk heap and
toss rocks at the rats.



DEATH/WISH

When you leap from the hay-
loft again, Brother,
please land this time
on your feet.

Death will always be the wrong fort
for an eight-year-old
to hide within.

When you leap from the hay-
loft again, Brother,
please assume

that bottle must have been buried
beneath the hay you fell into
on all fours that afternoon.

When you rose from the hay
wrists out, your skin
opened like a piano
lid, strings and levers

exposed. When your fingers pressed
on keys, we both waited for a sound.

The last time we raced the living
room, your right big toe swallowed
a sewing needle hidden in the shag

carpet. In the backseat, your foot
propped up, brown thread trembled
out of your skin like the tail
of a rat just eaten. When the doctor