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Elegy for 926F

Emily Banks

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EMILY BANKS

ELEGY FOR 926F

“Like her mother, she was killed by a hunter.” – *The New York Times*

They call it a *harvest*. Like picking fruit,
except instead of sweet juice spilling out,
staining your fingers, you get a pool
of sticky pungent blood
as her muscular shape collapses to a heap
of dark gray fur, her flashlight eyes
dim and her wet-black nose
stops twitching for your scent.
She leaves behind a daughter, to whom she'd recently
ceded her alpha role. Didn't she know?
The only thing men in America
want to hurt more than a woman is a woman
old enough to bear
scars and bare fangs without shame.
My mother's yoga teacher told her class
open your heart to the sun and she realized
for years she'd hunched her back,
caved in her chest to conceal
herself from predators.
I want to pull their eyes from their sockets,
axe their hands at the wrists.
I want to watch a generation of women
with gray hair march out

into the afternoon sunlight and stretch
their bodies long and strong like wolves.
I think of her at breakfast,
high school mornings, motioning me to pull
my shirt up and cover my breasts.
I'd roll my eyes. Because they lived so close
to Yellowstone, these wolves
had learned to trust humans,
making them easy targets
for hunters. Maybe she didn't want to believe
her mother either, wanted to think
it was different now, that these humans
were just being friendly, snapping photos to save
a wild moment for the mantle
of their suburban homes. They called her *Spitfire*.
I wish we didn't have to run
or hide, I wish that men were brave
enough for a fair fight, their small blunt teeth
and filed fingernails against the jaws and claws
of mother wolf. I don't want to memorize
the boundaries of survival, how many feet
away from protection I may wander
before a target grows across my chest.
I want to roam the streets, the fields,
the forests in my push-up bra, I want
to take a rifle and defend the wolves.