**Skiing**

It starts with a simple slow glide to a line full of people

All chattering with excitement

Barely recognizing the cold that seeps into their gear

As they radiate a warming anticipation

The line quickly lurches forward with each passing chair

Speeding to the takeoff zone

Careful not to overshoot, while also quickly preparing

Squatting for a few burning seconds until gently met with the supportive chair

Then your off

Slowly being lifted in the air

The crisp cold breeze biting at your nose as you climb higher

Eagerness mixing with desperation

Forming a pit in your stomach

As the clunking grows loader with each ascending inch

Fear creeps in

Banging and rattling reverberate with every bump

When was the chair last updated?

Clinking beginning to roar

Does that metal seem rusty?

Jangling is normal… right?

With one final clash, it’s time

For a quick few seconds you’re left dangling in the air

Nothing holding you back as you lift the safety bar

And then it’s over

You swiftly exit, thankful for your life

Feeling a new appreciation for safety

But the appreciation is short lived as exhilaration returns

It leads you to the edge of the precipice

Your body tingling and bubbling up

The air around you tight, almost choking

And yet so fresh and satisfying

A quick pause feels necessary

As you stand on the edge

Teetering between whizzing freedom and safety

The snow falls gently if only for a second

Like a brilliant swirl of grace and beauty

In that moment there is one last deep calming breath

And then you’re off

Racing down as ice and snow pelt your only bare skin

Never has anything felt so reckless, yet elegant

Shifting from side to side

Gaining intensity and speed with every second

This is what pure freedom feels like

It’s as if every fiber of your being is bolting downward

Feeling as if nothing keeps you down, except gravity itself

But that small amount of gravity is nothing

Nothing compared to the flutter of you heart

Nothing like the thrill of zipping through air

The end is in sight

Gradually your descent relaxes

Feeling more like a beautiful and smooth afternoon stroll

Until finally you come to a sudden stop

Accomplishment and joy flow through you

You exude elation

For a brisk second

You are completely satisfied

But then the vigor for freedom returns

And you find yourself returning to the line

**mastectomy**

The oak tree in our backyard

had always seemed sturdy and

unshakeable, its roots planted further in the ground

than you ever could when planting your feet in stubbornness.

We were so caught up with tracing how far down its

roots traveled that we failed to notice the frailty of

the roughened bark curling around the trunk.

We neglected to observe that the spirograph of branches

were devoid of the usual chlorophyll green,

even amongst the sticky July afternoons

When the landscapers came that August,

they spared no mercy.

They perched like vultures as

they sawed away at the upper limbs.

Then came the buzzing of their chainsaw

as they amputated the

gargantuan stem of the tree,

until only a stump remained.

They couldn’t get to the roots though,

couldn’t dig deep enough to displace

those anchors still desperately clinging to life.

I watched as they fed

the trunk and branches through

the jaws of their wood chipper machine,

watched as our oak became nothing more

than flooring for

a children’s playground.

I think this is what they mean to do to

your body. They mean to cut away at the part of you

that makes you female.

The part of you that you’ve never really

cared about until it was threatened.

You watch the tree being cut down then

trace your fingers

down the seams of your body

and they feel weak. Like they

have been lazily stitched together

on your grandmother’s barely functional sewing machine.

Even though you know your body is pieced together with

tendons and muscles stronger than even

the most stalwart of branches,

there is still fear that you will never be whole again.

They say the carcinoma has already burrowed

underneath your skin.

He has taken up residence there.

Unpacked his bags,

laid his perfumes across the counter,

hung his coats up along

the insides of your ribcage.

He curls up in the flesh

where armpit meets chest,

takes his shoes off and settles in for a nap,

stretches his arms out,

nails scratching the inner surface of your breast,

feet stomping gracelessly across the curve

of your body.

Instead of electric saws

and woodchippers, they will come

at you with scissors and scalpels.

And it will feel like picking up your

seam ripper

to tear yourself apart,

even if you know it is only

so you can put yourself back

together again with stronger

stitching.

When you try to

tear yourself apart

to excise this invader,

your hand trembles.

You drop the seam ripper. Pick it up again.

Drop it. Pick it up. Drop it. Pick it up.

Drop it. Grasp it with both hands.

Even if you know cutting it out will save you,

it is hard to slice away at your own body.

Hard to watch a tree being cut down

and reduced to a stump,

even when you know

it’s diseased.

**elegy for childhood**

I keep every birthday card I’ve ever received in a Nike shoebox

beneath my bed. My sneakers have long since outgrown the confines

of the box, yet somehow every birthday I’ve had

manages to fit in there.

My 6th birthday was held in my basement, the first party

I had with my friends. We were princesses, the scratchy tulle of our gowns

only serving to inspire us to fiercely rule our carpeted kingdoms from

atop crushed-velvet-sofa thrones. My 10th birthday was in my

kitchen, we made pizza and cupcakes, but now the only thing I can

remember is the laughter ricocheting off the walls as we painted our

faces with streaks of flour. My 13th birthday was the first one

where I felt acutely aware that I was growing up, the first birthday

I noticed the faint lines wrinkling around my parent’s eyes, where

suddenly they didn’t seem so young anymore.

I am now almost 20 and I wonder where the time/years/innocence

went. I ache for days where my worries were light enough to

store in the back of my brother’s tonka toy truck. When my problems

were small enough to be tucked into bed alongside me and my

cavalcade of stuffed animals.

I hoard memories of my youth, letting them play through my mind on

an old film reel: the heart-stopping promise of adventure woven

through muddy footprints traversing the backyard/chlorine-soaked hair/satisfied

exhaustion that ran bone-deep/sprawled limbs across lush grass, searching

for patterns in the sky above/patchwork quilts of bruises and scrapes across

my shins from hours of tag at recess.

I flip through childhood photos, searching for

a glimpse of who I used to be. Or perhaps I’m

searching for a link between the juice-box stained shirts

and who I am now. The starry-eyed idealist with a mouthful

of crooked teeth seems almost foreign to me now. I cannot

reconcile who I am with the face that looks back beneath the

plastic covered albums, and so I shove her back into that

orange Nike shoebox, a problem for another day, when I am

strong enough to properly lament the years that have passed.