

## Raleigh-Durham poems (workshop)

### **Playground by the Mennonite Church**

We became heathens  
when we were so cautious of the woods out back  
and yet we would enter all the same.  
We thought there was a man in those woods  
and he would only appear if we were alone.  
When the grownups went in there to see  
if we were in as much danger as we claimed,  
they returned with nothing.  
We still felt strange eyes on our necks  
when we stood at the edge.

We became heathens  
when we found two frogs dead  
right outside the church,  
hand-in-hand like little martyrs.  
We marveled at the needle skeletons.  
We could find no shovels,  
so we covered them in moss. We just  
wanted to honor them, with coal words  
and humble scratches on holy walls.  
We got reprimanded anyway.  
How were we supposed to know  
that we were insulting God?

We became heathens  
when we got married right outside the church.  
I volunteered to be the minister  
and regretted it.

I wanted to marry Brianna  
but Naomi got to her first.  
It was child's play,  
it was just a kissing game.  
Scared parents punished us because  
we did not do it with boys.

I became a heathen  
when I told my friends that I would miss them,  
when I tried to explain how I could see  
our days passing by in fast forward,  
how even if I wished we could return  
to ignorance and bliss, we never would.  
And they looked at me like I was insane.

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### **Durham Farmers Market**

The dozen or so farmers  
and rancher grandparents  
snuck me goodies,  
cookies and honey,  
before the bell rang and sales began.  
The single living green spot,  
with minimal trees and grass desperate to live  
in a city that worships  
gears, industry, and bulls.

I was the shy thing everyone cooed at  
when they saw me hiding  
behind my dad, under the tables,  
away from the crowds.  
Though timid, I was tough.

When I fell and bled, I laughed.

Dorothy, who made the tastiest empanadas,  
whose mouth spat  
curses, outlined by *Fire*  
and *Ice* lipstick,  
is gone now.

The buffalo farmer, Charles,  
who put his whole heart into his laughter,  
so much that it one day stopped  
to the shock of everyone,  
is gone now.

George, forgive me, *Queen* George  
with dyed hair, piercings, and words  
that are just a little bit off the wall,  
for as long as I can remember,  
is still around.

Thank goodness.

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## **Falls Lake**

I thought there may be  
something waiting  
to grab me as soon  
as my toes no longer touched  
the muddy bottom.  
I was being stupid  
because there's a net  
enclosing the swim area.

That makes it safe,  
right?  
Don't fall in.  
It's Falls Lake.

As we walked along the shoreline,  
I found a blue-black catfish washed up  
that wasn't there the day before.  
A monstrous fish so much bigger than me,  
a mouth that could have easily fit my head,  
whiskers half the length of my arm,  
and an enormous bite taken out of its side  
with porcelain nail bones exposed.  
My dad looked at it,  
then into my eyes, and said,  
'Something in the water attacked her.'  
Don't fall in.  
It's Falls Lake.

We watched a meteor shower  
on the bridge over the deepest part.  
My dad and I played 20 Questions,  
watched the sunset,  
and I told him stories about the stars  
that he probably already knew.  
What I didn't tell him  
was that I wanted to run  
to a place that doesn't exist.  
Someplace where I wasn't  
plagued by thoughts telling me

that the stars don't matter,  
that the sunset doesn't matter,  
that it wouldn't matter  
if I never saw them again.  
I looked down at the water  
that hid so many from the naked eye  
and I thought to myself,  
Go ahead.  
Fall in.  
It's Falls Lake.  
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### **Carolina Dance Center**

Girls move like fish through water.  
Muscular, quick, efficient,  
no movement without grace.  
This is a sea of pink legs,  
suits too tight for bodies too young.  
I've forgotten how to move  
in a way that feels natural.

Testing the limits of our ability  
often lead to dramatic setbacks.  
Cracked bones, torn ligaments,  
wails echoing through the studio,  
amplified by concrete walls  
towering above.  
If I never got hurt, did that really mean  
I was successful?

This isn't the place for a child  
who doesn't know what they want.  
Following orders to a beat,  
while indulging in something  
forbidden.  
Confidence ripped to pieces  
by mirrors on all sides,  
eyes on all sides.

I could say it helped in some way.  
I should have thought better of it.  
Nobody wants to get near the girl  
who had a crush  
on another girl.  
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### **The House on Ray Road**

"They killed the father in that house."  
"They chopped him up."  
"They put him in the freezer."

*What monsters would take another life?*  
Because death, to a small child, was  
such an alien concept.

"Because he was beating the mother,  
because he was tormenting the kids."

"Because they were tired of living in fear,  
because they saw their chance."

"Because they wanted to stay together,  
because they were scared."

Learning from the teacher  
who knew the children,  
and thinking,

*'I understand now.'*

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### **Leesville Road High School**

Paper towels are spread across the floor,  
red blooming across the white,  
to hide evidence  
that this is not  
a place of purity.  
To hide evidence  
of girls growing up too quickly,  
losing their innocence  
as they add to the population.  
To hide evidence  
of rage overruling civility in one of the  
'Better Schools.'

Sounds of hormones in the hallways  
immediately turn quiet

in response to clicking heels.  
Clicking heels signal control.  
Day after day after day after day  
under hysteria-bright lights.  
The scratch of pencil on standardized tests,  
expletives screamed down the hallway  
from those who have had enough.  
Remember that you represent the future.

Hollywood glamorizes this privilege,  
avoids ugly parts in favor of musicality.  
We should be grateful for the chance  
at a better life that we are given  
in such a glorious developed nation.

*Are you a girl or a boy?*  
Asks a stoned girl.  
*I've never seen a lesbian before.*  
Remarks a boy who says he is  
'better than other guys.'  
*Ew, get away from me!*  
From a girl in gym class who thinks  
I should not be allowed in the locker room.

Can I read my damn book  
in peace, please?



He was only playing around.

He's a good kid.

Top of his class.

Why are you making a big deal out of this?

Remember that

boys will be boys.

We are not supposed to think about  
children reflexively looking for exits  
in every room they enter,  
places to hide,  
places to cry silently,  
places to pray  
that the Poor Misunderstood Boy,  
who nonchalantly carried  
his dad's God-given American right  
onto school grounds,  
won't find you.

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### **Not Home**

I am a guest.

The house is cleaned for my arrival.

Mom laughs with me the way  
that she does with her friends  
over brunch gossip.

Negativity is out, unhealthy  
news is swept under the rug.  
If I am the one to remind her,  
her eyes say that this guest has  
outstayed her welcome.

Dad and I speak in hushed voices.  
It is the only way we can talk now.  
Something is wrong.  
Mom acts like it is all peachy keen,  
especially in front of guests.  
My baby would never do that!  
*Stop picking on her!*

Even if what she did was  
unforgivable,  
stupid,  
irate?  
Even if what she did  
goes against  
basic human decency?

Even if what she did  
is driving away  
guests like me?  
Into uncertainty,  
into desperation  
for something different,  
for something  
that won't remind me  
that this is not my home?

I want to drive  
hours upon hours  
so I can get lost,  
get out of a house where  
I am being kept in  
the Guest Goldfish Bowl.