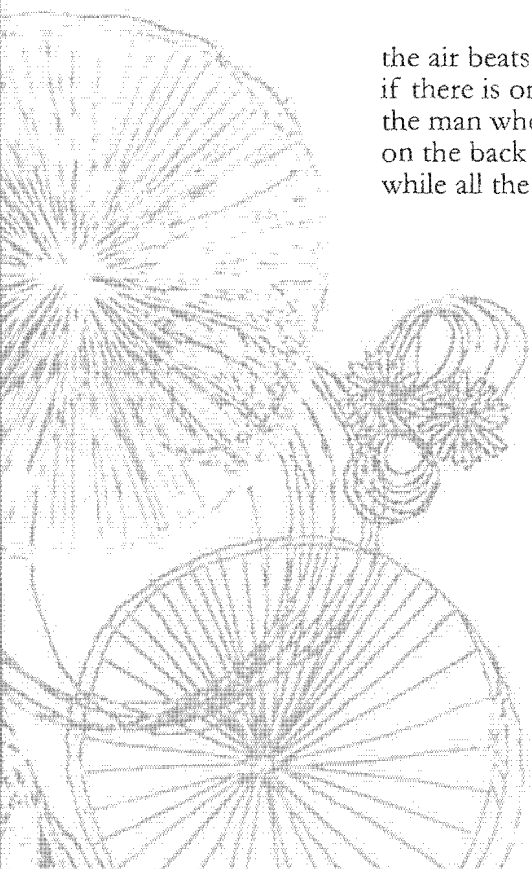


EVERYTHING HERE SEEMS BROKEN

DUSTIN ACTON



the air beats loudly against the walls of your ears.
if there is only one heart beating what should happen if it would stop?
the man who used to pick me up after preschool
on the back of a black motorcycle,
while all the other kids were waiting for the bus

and how I would cling tightly and when
the pavement seemed to dance
I would close my eyes and
everything was still dancing
no darkness,
but green and blue,
no darkness anywhere,
ever.

sometimes I feel like I grew up in the hospital.
watching that giant slide through magnetic tubes,
or come out of operating rooms
with a partly shaved head and
stitches covering a new hole
wider than a mouth
that if stared at too long
would eat you.

and always with the mouth
 the eyes seem a little less focused
 like it had swallowed their shine.
 at night that mouth seemed
 to paint itself on the edges of my vision,
 dreams of clenched bone,
 the sound of teeth gnashing
 and lungs that forgot how to breath.

and a beating,
 a drum,
 the slaughter of time.
 no blue or green now.
 only darkness that stretches on forever,
 beckoning you to the edges.
 what colors did you see?
 the orange that killed you?
 or the family you left behind?

first they wouldn't let you work anymore.
 so you would go outside each day
 and beat paths through the woods
 clearing the trails that me and my brother
 would follow later.
 it never seemed to bother you.
 but I felt it too.

at school the counselors tell you
 about the seven stages of acceptance
 after death
 like there is some shopping list
 you have to go through
 and everything will be ok,
 but it's not like that.

there's only four
 and they don't teach you them in school.
 first a person becomes only a face,
 the embodiment not of memories
 but of photographs memorized and
 hung on the walls of your mind,
 then just lips and eyes,
 then a name,
 then just a feeling that every now and then
 knocks you in the gut and makes you fall
 spitting and convulsing on the floor.

accept that.

outside my window now
 the pavement still dances
 only its people now
 and lives and loves
 and I can no longer move with them but
 fall with a painful gravity to the center gasping,
 an echo of teeth maybe,
 or maybe I'm the one biting.
 I can no longer tell.

once at night years later
 I went back to the house
 where you last were and swear
 I saw your body moving through the forest,
 cutting down tree limbs and
 clearing trails for others to follow.
 a white glow hung suspended in the darkness,
 there was nothing I could do but leave.

