LOST IN TRYING

Her voice is chalky summer heat, pale scratching in the sky, tenor of clouds thinned by years of tanged gin, wrapped around the phone like broken cigarettes as she talks to me. Her words jitter—small jewelry, flashy rubies.

Her friend just killed himself, she says, slowly breaking, wooden. After countless flushed needle rights and empty park bottle searchers, she finds she can't cook death in a pot, choke it down, or boil it until clean, it's something her macrobiotic diet can't pepper—the leafy relationship of skin to soul.

We could've had sex but our weather wasn't right: magnetic fields pulled apart by city streets, compass needle floating in the river she grew up on, between her Earth & my North it rains empty windows from green-mesh sky, I only slept in her couch once, when her boyfriend was out of town.

She once showed me her sunflowers: plate-round brown eyes and yellow lashes. She was proud of the way they looked out from her porch unaffected by our sounds, voices yelling, trash on the lawn, streets littered with rust & shadows.

"He tried hard to be happy, now his soul is lost in trying." That's how she describes dying, and those words seemed rooted in her like the sunflowers how she feels she must try to go to school, buy groceries, laugh despite black & white living room memories of brother knocking off black patent leather shoes and touching her inside, her father's bottleneck morbid slogging & watching. So long ago, all grown now.

I used to think that I would come back as a toad or an elm, somehow knowing more than this bowed moment hovering the streets in this city as we talk, only blocks away. She once told me about her grandmother's floating deathbed, candles on strings and the virgin glued to dark plywood. I said to her, "You were witness to the place where candles hold old women to the gravity of light." She didn't understand. To her, death is snow, leaving her wandering alone in patterns she can't see—

I want to touch these shapes she makes: wide lips, wet corners of mouth, her cheek bone in the small of my back before we are brushed into the stalk of some slow moving cloud. Run my hands over her thick roots, kiss the dirt, the knotted memories coiling, reaming her insides and show her that I am spiraled, too. Our death together would be this; buried in hand holds, fingered soil, sun-flowered above and looking in, peaceful and done.