

**New Poetry from Alise  
Versella: "Parallels," "Red-  
Breasted Sparrows," "I Wonder  
If History's Men Knew They  
Would Be Great," "A Fierce  
Sense of Resolve"**



TRENCHES OF MY LUNGS / *image by Amalie Flynn*

**PARALLELS**

The birds with conviction

Tap out their lyrics in the snow  
And their chatter descends upon the mountains  
Look how the flowers still struggle to grow  
Like lungs filling with air  
The soft despair  
    of endings  
        of so much life lived  
It must be written  
And then it must be sung  
Like the chorus of a sun after a lightning storm  
The bees like oboe players thrum  
The morning sky an afterbirth of blood  
This is how we love  
It's also how hate seeds in the veins  
But mostly  
Morning's birthing is how the stars are made  
Occasionally  
The stars burn out  
Like flames in church hall candles  
Their ashes floating on the wind  
But for centuries death is how time begins  
Infinite explosions and black holes  
All the songs the Earth sings that we don't know  
The words to  
Like psalms in a foreign language  
But they have always been my favorites  
Like autumn's blood-red season  
Her heavy soil and decay  
I love how a little death choreographs  
The sycamores in a grand ballet

### **RED-BREASTED SPARROW**

There's one red-breasted sparrow and he speaks  
To me of grief, how snow diseased emerald  
Spring, the morning worm dying in his beak  
All alone he'll sleep between twigs nestled

As I am nestled warmly into bed  
Goldenrod spears through plants on windowsills  
That know not of sickness in heart or head  
Mourn not, for there's glory in winter rose

The map of my veins runs wild with blood  
I breathe to fill my lungs unconsciously  
Outside the beehive with sweet honey hums  
Hexagonal cities, combs built between

These milk bones of mine like geometry  
Have faith in the calculations a body sings

### **I WONDER IF HISTORY'S MEN KNEW THEY WOULD BE GREAT**

In case you were wondering

    If at all you do wonder

I mean stare off into the space collecting dust particles in  
the sun

Wonder

I hope you wander forward

Do not get stuck in the loop of reliving

All the conversations you wish you held

    Isn't it funny how we always think of the  
right remark after the arrow has left the quiver?

Sailed on like great fleets on uncharted seas

Circling around unknown America thinking it was the West  
Indies

    We all just want to discover something

Like a cure for the aching

I hope your daydreams lead you to rejoicing

In the architecture of your body

    A city skyline rising

    How it glimmers like those dust particles in the sun

I hope you wonder about the things you could become

    Not what you have done

I hope you never ruminate on anything you think you missed

That it isn't here anymore only means there is room on the  
gallery walls for new art

Do you understand what I am telling you?

Your mouth is a paint brush; I want the acrylic to speak to me  
a new language

Teach me a new word for matrimony  
That colors and my empty sighs could wed  
And the canvas and I

Would bleed a glorious red

                                  The beautiful ruin of the withering day  
How you empty it out for its worth because no gold can stay

In case you were wondering

I dream about the galaxy, turn my mind to stargazing  
Believe in little green men terrorizing craters like two-year-  
old boys ransack the waiting room

We are all waiting for something to begin

Daydream about what that is

I know it to be breathing under water; I am waiting for my  
gills to appear

I want to swim, Pinocchio in the mouth of the whale

Don't you see?

Movement is the way the lake ripples, breathing

The sky is a wave cresting

And you could be as great

As history's greatest men

                                  If only you believed the way they did.

## **A FIERCE SENSE OF RESOLVE**

Resolutions require revolution

And I have been at battle with the nation of my body since  
puberty

I have gone to war with my heart as it broke

And broke  
And broke  
Reinforced the battalions to hold the pieces up  
And the bullets ricocheted off the trenches of my lungs  
And I swore the fires pillaging the village of my stomach  
would wipe out the living

I am living like a militia razing the fields of foreign  
countries

I am burning the boundaries  
Rewriting the policies  
I am done policing this body

I am done living like I am a war-torn country  
A refugee seeking refuge from my own self-pity  
I am finished doubting the ability to achieve my dreams  
Just because they haven't happened yet

Civilization was not built easily  
There was death in battle and conquerors invading  
Trespassers trying to take away  
All that I made  
Of myself

How dare I  
Monarch and sovereign body  
Forget that I am royalty  
A king  
A rajah in the Bhagavad  
How dare I lose faith in the ruby red of my blood  
Propelling the turbines of this heart

I have resolved to tap this vein  
And inundate the land  
The great flood once again  
Ready your ark and corral your lambs

The fox is on the hunt  
I am cunning enough

To see through the lies I tell myself

A kitsune never deceives herself

Never traps herself in the hunter's snare

She will own the year

And the forest

And the air

Breathe the freedom she pulled from his rib.