

“There is me and there is flesh, and there is me and flesh together.”

—Alan Pelaez Lopez

Beside a river I met a child who gifted me rocks
and proudly declared
“I am Cyrus. I am five. And I am a boy.”
Faced with a confidence so absolute
I wondered why
it took me so long to claim what I am,
wondered *what am I?*
when I watched ice melt
and drip
drip
drop
into the stream below where my face was
reflected among the violent bubbling.
This was all the mirrors I had encountered
in which I watched myself be born,
a tiny body that swings legs without logic,
a strange pile of genitals and lumps.
I confided in my seventh grade best friend,
who started puberty at the same time I did,
though she treated it like a changing room,
where we were trying on dresses
and she had found the one that fit her perfectly.
I said something like
“Sometimes I look in the mirror
and I swear I am watching myself be born,
thrashing until
I come to rest
a strange pile of genitals and lumps.
Do you know what I mean?”
I said something like
“Sometimes I feel like a neon clown
clambering about too-big shoes.
Do you feel like this too?”

I said something like
“I don’t think any of these dresses
fit me just right.
Where in the store did you find yours?”

Since then I have been
breaking myself into many pieces
and sorting them.
I pretend to be someone else and
think of the way I put my hands in my pockets
and the way all men’s fashion is very ankle-centric
but I have always hated my ankles.
Then I gather all the bits of myself,
put them in one big pile in a notebook.
It is only in language that I am a body and
only a body.
I start testosterone as an act of revision,
placing my prescription atop a pile of suggestions
penned onto my poetry,
poetry that bends a sentence at the
center,
a body that bends at the
center.

There is me.

A notebook and one big pile of myself. A body.

And there is flesh.

Strange piles of genitals and neon clowns and change worn like a well-fitting dress.

And then there is me and flesh together.

Writing myself, revising myself. Don’t you see? I am Ellen and I am twenty and I am nothing more
than that.