

The quail have bumble foot; their claws look like paws and remind me of the dogs which are closer to the actual family. Their puffy blisters remind me of their humanity but they are not human but humanity is still there. I feel like humanity should be a different word. Or maybe I am learning that animals are beloved and like us, only a chromosome or two apart from us. Our zoo is overflowing. We got 7 quail to busy us, to infuse stewardship and self-reliance during this global quarantined pandemic. They laid eggs. We put 7 eggs from the quail under our Broody Silky hen. She hatched four. One died and three lived. We took them because she was too big to manage them but she still wanted to be a mommy. She wanted to fulfill the measure of her creation. So we got her three, four day old Buff Orpington baby chicks. There was risk she would not accept them. At first she pecked at them and then Moses, my son, shoved them under her warm bottom and she accepted them like a warm, firm embrace they were hers. And the quail babies are growing. 4 days old now. Their parents have bumble foot. An infection/foot disease that if not treated can lead to death. With research we learn our best way to treat them; daily we soak their feet in Epsom salts for 15 minutes and then take one at a time out and hold them tight even though the protest. They want the free air and want not to be clutched in Moses' clutches while I spray hydrogen peroxide on them. His nimble hands rub the cleaner in and we size up the blister and swollen feet. Some must have a waxy plug removed in order to heal. The tweezers pull at the yellow and it is hard. The quail is docile or erratic. Moses, my junior, advises me that maybe we don't have the right tool. Dad's tweezers with their sharp edges might be more effective. I disregard, tomorrow, when we do it all over again I can try those. That is like me, in the moment, not in the tomorrow. Sometimes tomorrow shows you have to cull the yellow puss off that blister and it would have been better to have done it yesterday. In the amateur veterinary experience Mickey, the dog snatched one of the quail, wounded it. Moses, steady and confident because he is the one who seeks for provident living and primitive management and has trialed and erred other circumstances. That trying gives room to build confidence for other scenarios. He assessed the bird and decided it would be more humane to kill it. The dog has de-feathered it and bruised it and it can't fly. The others would peck him to death anyway if we don't separate them. So he looks up the best way to kill it. We try to keep the deemed --necessary action from Moses's sisters, Adrianna and Rainbow. They, like Fern in Charlotte's web, see absolutely no difference. We wouldn't kill a person when they are wounded? Why this bird. I give them some sad lines like We don't have an avian bird veterinarian in this vicinity. It would die anyway. They don't buy it. Meanwhile Moses has broken the neck of the little delicate Coturnix Japanese quail. They have been domesticated for their eggs. They are so pretty. Like tear drops with feathers, like the ocean landscape. I am in the kitchen when he is killing it. With a meat thermometer trying to get the water to under boil to 150 degrees. Moses tell me the next day he didn't break the neck perfectly and swiftly made it happen on the second try. Trying so desperately not to cause it more pain. You never really know. He brings the plucked bird. The pin feathers took the most time to remove and swirls it in the 150 degree water to loosen the rest. We roast it at 500 degrees in a cast iron pan we last made blackberry pie in. I chop sage, rosemary from our garden and a clove of garlic and salt and pepper it. Some inside and some inside. Crumbled bacon and bacon grease. 15 minutes later it is done. It was good. But sort of disappointing. Knowing its life intimately, you must decide if ending its life was worth it. I read the bones were edible, so, not wanting to waste its life I tried

the crispy bones. As they got thicker I chose not to eat it. Maybe Coturnix quail would have chosen not to die, not to be my bone menu. It did not have robust meat. Probably why they breed high meat beings to eat. It better be worth it. My children: Rainbow, Phineas, Moses and I tried it. Doing it and especially around the circumstances made it feel easier. It would have died anyway. At least we did not waste it. Her. She is a she not an it. She is a being in my belly and she nourished me.

Remote learning for these kids has been going on for two days. On the first day, Moses sat at his desk piled with old license plates, hooks, sinkers, copper coils, feathers, snips and snails and puppy dog tails. And three, four day old quail. During Business class, he tied three lines he will use for catching Surf Perch this weekend at Lincoln City. Should I feign disapproval that he is not listening in class or omit satisfaction that he is finding industry in the means that match his soul? We put antibiotic cream on the blister or the open wound and wrap it with bandage tape. Then the next foot. Then we put them back in their clean coop. Man they poop a lot. While Moses is working- his work is raking the earth and combing the feathers. He is 16 and a man. And I feel something sacred about carving out the delicate paw-feet of these birds. I know I only have a little more time to tend the animals and find waxy plugs and expel them with the hope that my invasive action will have a positive healing result tomorrow. And I already feel a melancholy knowing that he won't be with me tomorrow. And hoping that whoever he is with will see how precious this kid is. I pick up the tweezers, peroxide, paper towels, towel, bandage snips and manage them. In the trash, cleaning, flushing with clean water and disinfecting soap and this time I tuck all the items in the same drawer so we can find them easy tomorrow. All of this exists on the eve of the week where our air was stifled, western wildfires 14 in Oregon ravaged the timber and rural towns. Eating them the way the political machine is eating them and the world and its people and its life feeling the ashes and the wounds of them being consumed. Today we breathe, deeply, without thinking about breathing, the very best kind of breath. Since the air is fresh I go check on the momma Silky hen and her three chicks she loves. One peeks out, curious who has arrived. One on her back and the other one not visible. Momma hen reminds me of me. The missing chick is like Moses, busy. Maybe pulling the rainbow glass corn stalks and sorting some for the quail habitat and some for the chicken coop. Where there are developed corn nugget gems, Moses saves them for his sister, Rainbow, who will appreciate their beauty far more than the primitive poultry. Rainbow cares for the chickens, too. Sort of. I pick up the slack since I wake up in the morning earlier than them. I do the bare minimum, what I can do today. I am less concerned about the future. For the now I add more water to their murky water tin. At least I dilute the mud. And I release them from the safety of their coop. That is all. I feed the dumb dogs. The dumbest one mickey who made us eat the quail. I even feed him. Who am I to decide who eats and who does not? I am the mother that's who.

I am a mother that became a mother as a child

I lost my motherhood before I gained it

And when I gained it

I thought I was gaining one child

But I gained another

And lost another.

The meadow with cheat grass picking at my socks

Tells me I am a mother from here

But I have never been here

I feel home, mother, grandmother, great grandmother running my hands on the curved arc of the rusted horseshoe in Wrigleys' dilapidated sheep sheds

I do a cartwheel

Cause I am a fun, free mother

Cartwheel over sagebrush that has re-seeded itself despite being pulled out by my great great grandmother

I don't bring those who make me mother

But I feel sick that I did not

I feel the sunset painted gentle like a watercolor

It sings to me the sweet hay refrain that tomorrow the sun will shine again

My mother is on a couch that is sunken in on the left side

I cannot tell my mother the things that as a mother pang my soul

I cannot tell her that the girl I mother doesn't care about being a girl

I can tell her that Moses wants to fish because that is familiar to her, known to my mother

But she will still tell him to cut his hair and not to bring any fish home - cause the mess

And Anna with her Mohawk, my mother will not understand that all it is, is self-expression

Her purple hair is not a gay statement

Just a color

My mother doesn't feel like my mother

But a foreign, infected abscess like the waxy plug in the blister of the Coturnix quail's foot

But abscess and I share the same DNA

You can tell from our mannerisms

Our voyeurisms

Our gossipisms

And Rainbow, she can accept because she is young and obedient and like my younger me

Just don't get older, Rainbow

Or that sunset will not sing of watercolor refrains

And Phineas, she can't say his name right

And won't

Not even a name can you get right

Like her mother

My grandmother

Whom I am less quick to claim as my own

Who put all at arm's length

Who vowed never to call my son Moses- for that sounds like a black baby name

And what of it

How wondrous to sound deep, dark, unknown, ebony, lilac, murky like the thing that happens
after the sunset

No, unknown, dark, without color

Mother would never allow it

Allow, as if I need mother's permission

I care less today about her approval

But more tomorrow when I call her and have this pulsing need to tell my DNA, my mother about
the griefs that cannot

Be spoken

But she interrupts and cuts me off

The way night does

When you are not ready for it

You were in the middle of surgical removal of bumble foot on the tender quail foot

But it matters not.

The sun is down

O if you don't want to hurt yourself, the quail and your daughter

You best shut up

But, mother, you never do.

You think maybe this time will be better than the last

But it is night

The time when she is awake

The time when the children you mother roam the hallways

Make pesto, tubular macaroni and cheese

And you ignore them

With the pretense that you have to get up in the morning for work

But you don't even value your job

And who's kidding who,

Your creations that made you mother.