Brave

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“I love being a woman.”

Why do those words roll like marbles
Feel so round and right
Spilling over my lips
Ricocheting off the floors and shattering ceilings

Why is it so radical to identify with my identity?

To love being a woman
You must love being vulnerable.

To love being a human being, period, you have to love being vulnerable

But I think that women, especially, have to relearn every day
How to define vulnerable
How to be naked without despising nakedness

And it’s not just removing pieces of armor
Meant to protect your heart and stomach and brain
It’s harder than that
Because women don’t learn to put on armor one piece at a time.

I was fourteen years old when I learned
A boy could say he wanted to rape me
And call it a joke.

And there isn’t time to slide on your wrist guards
Or buckle on a shield
You just buckle
Knees give out
And the fetal position protects the most important things,
You think,
And your arms cover your head
And you have made yourself so small
And you get tough fast.

“I love being a feminist.”

What a notorious identity.

How can those five words start a forest fire
Are they the smoldering cigarette?
Or a lifetime of dried out weeds?

And yeah, I’m fiery
“Passionately angry and deeply felt”
Because there is something to be angry about
When iron-jawed angels fought to die to survive
And you won’t open your mouth and say that you see that there’s something wrong here.

I was sixteen years old when I learned
A boy can use “you should be grateful I’m not asking for more”
When you say no.

I was sixteen years old when I learned
Girls can be shot
For wanting other girls to learn to read.

I am not overreacting.

“I love being a daughter of God.”

And now suddenly there are too many ways
To be politically incorrect
I can’t have all three, you say:
Woman, feminist, Christian

If you take away one third of my identity
I’m a two dimensional line.
And the toxicity is suffocating
When you keep denying that there is something wrong here.

I was eighteen years old when I learned
That in Rwanda, civilian Tutsi women were raped
And intentionally infected with HIV
Mutilated or left with sick bodies housing sick babies
As a tactic and weapon of war.

I was eighteen years old when I learned
A male bank teller got the number of my underage friend from her account
And tried to ask her out.

I was eighteen years old when I learned
That thousands of women in the country where my sister wants to live
Remain in abusive relationships
Because you can’t get job promotions if you’re divorced.

I was eighteen years old when I learned
That I love being a Christian feminist woman
And that is terrifying
And that is brave.

So do not tell me that I cannot love that there are women who are strong enough
To tell their stories and say
There is something wrong here.

Because there is something wrong here.