I remember eating an apple when I was young
like most people remember their first kiss.
Red Delicious. Wine red. Red
and cut
before my eyes into slices, splayed like a flower,
as if the apple itself—the thickened petals
of a certain rose—
opened on the plate
to a flesh bloom. I remember the taste
of the first slice in my mouth, the living
cinnamon, my small hand lifting
the crescent
to my lips, and then lifting another crescent,
then another. Upstairs, by the banister, the rails
before my face like prison bars,
I ate
not one apple but two. Or three. More. Not
a flower but a mound, the pile of petals at the foot
of a fallen rose: not a five-petalled
apple flower
but the roses we have bred to be monstrous
with petals, a child born with eight or ten
fingers on each hand, waving them
nervously
in the crib. I ate till I was sick and the three
brothers behind me burst into laughter. Then
they began to fall out over who’d clean it up.
I went fifteen years without eating an apple. Who else can say that but Eve? Fifteen years without the hard crunch that now I prefer above all things, the hardest of apples, the lifted flesh that leaves a wound glazed with juice. Even thinking about it now I feel longing—a chilled Granny Smith, the tartness to the highest pitch of pleasure before pleasure turns: the belted note that would be a scream in any context other than song. It’s been too long now, when it’s been about three days.

And yet once it was fifteen years. I think of Eve among the crabs and wild species, after she’d been kicked out—after we had been. How all fruits must have been a pleasure to her, a privilege back then before pesticides, before supermarkets. Unthinkable: to have to wait for the fall to enjoy apples. But even then, in the world’s first falls, in the autumnal wealth of squashes, now big with Abel and holding the hand of jittery Cain, she must have looked suspiciously at apple trees, their fruits clustered with a mysterious tightness to the branch. Knowledge merely of how this or that apple tasted she must have told herself, ignoring the mother’s intuition that if her womb could deliver a body of good, she already held the hand of evil.
So maybe she went fifteen years like me, interim informed by both good and evil, before she stretched her middle-aged bones to a laden limb, bough bright with half a dozen apples, and plucked one, and ate.
Would the voice of God boom again from the heavens, the earth groan deep in its cavernous womb? Or maybe hers was another fear: that this was somehow that other tree, that she’d stumbled unawares back to the Garden, and so now, after so much life, would be constrained to live even longer.

3.

A man was involved. Tall, thin, English, late twenties, with long black hair in a pony tail.

*He gave me the fruit; I was hungry, so I ate.*
I had just met him on Vorhees Lawn

under a row of hundred-year-old oaks, the manicured lawn with three rows of oaks, columns in a Greek temple with a canopy of springtime green.

*I was just taking a walk.* Tiana dazzled among the oaks: tall, Nordic, cheekbones like shields on either side of her face, she was the Goddess Nike, white victory,
nineteen with round hips and azure eyes. Tiana saw him and whispered, “I think he’s cute; do you think he’s cute?” then walked up to where he sat against a tree reading a small book, a moment later motioning me over with her hand.

*I didn’t go until she called me, and then there was no way to politely refuse.*

Tiana flirted so easily that soon they were both flirting, and I was, too. *Just laughing with them. I am not a flirt.* He invited us back to his dorm room, the three of us on the edge of his bed for hours: I sat quiet, listening to their chatter until it was evening, until it was nearly midnight. And then he asked with his graduate student boldness if I wanted to spend the night. He looked directly at me, full eye contact and a half grin. *I don’t recall ever saying yes.* Tiana shrugged and lifted herself off the bed.

She collected her things while I was stuttering to reply. And soon she was gone, passing soundlessly out of the room, white Goddess drifting away from mortals, leaving
in silence the three of us: him, me,
and the bright Granny Smith on his desk.

*I did see it there, but I would not
have asked for it.* It was then that he offered,
picked it up and held it out to me.
*And how could I refuse it from his hand?*

The next morning, I recall walking home
through the oaks of Vorhees, light filtering
through the canopy, a tiny human dwarfed
in a temple of Gods. *I still didn’t know*

*what I had done, or why I had done it,
or why it was that I hadn’t done it before.*