

not child; not adult

Father-Beast: an Elegy

*Anything? Some surge of warm blood,
some excessive hormone which has lost
its organic wisdom.*

-Gaston Bachelard

A crow, flashes of oily black, flies into pines painted watercolor grey-green,
smudges of poor brown.
On the radio, a voice sighs, 'I won't sleep tonight.'

M-22 is endlessly in front of me: a housepainter's confident brushstroke.

*

Waiting for his return after church; I am
aimless. White trembling mountains of paperwork
sprawl treacherously across dull countertops.

He arrives – stale, creaky bones collapse
into his corner chair.

*

With aching cement walls, the lodge ebbs and flows
on his mercurial timing.

Drowning in Lethe, he surfaces briefly,
occasionally, always –
in his wake we must silently clean.
Were his footfalls always so heavy? We are too
naïve to know but he is too morose to remember.

*

laundry room, womb —
I return, humming and warm, rush of water-
fall outside, sweat of my labor: amniotic

*

He is frail, a house sagging
beneath wind, even sun.
Mice reside in the eaves,
nest in the attic.

*

constant murmur of water, crashing
and churning

salmon, blue-green and brown, like the pines —
darker spots in dark water, desperate to satisfy
their biological imperative to return home,
throwing their weight at the dam

*

Turkeys ruled his yard when we came
from the dense, swollen banks of the Catawba River.

Strutting while eating his grass seed, summer waned
as they grew plump and I grew quiet. He joked about serving them
for Thanksgiving, leaving me to wonder about residing
in his upstairs guest room.

*

Even this is an elegy to the woman
I imagined becoming.

Reveries toward Childhood

*Of childhoods I have so many
That I would get lost counting them.¹*

It could have happened that I was born
in water that lapped at rocks illumined by moonlight.

There would have been a red cabin standing –
a numinous sentry on a hill, naked earth around it.

If there had been oaks or lilac bushes, they'd have been
cut down, and any towering pine trees felled.

I was before then but under that stark thin moon,
in the water cold on my bare flesh, I was more.

In that cold water I am in
I am in the depths of myself.

In that cold water I could have been in
I could have been in myself.

In that primitive water I long for
I long for myself.

¹ Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Reverie* (Beacon Press, 1971) 112.

Modern Nightmare

I was dreaming – no longer in bed,
but floating in an endless ocean
holding my phone above my head
while I tread water in case
you text me

unable to hold myself afloat
any longer, I submerge my phone,
placing it back in my pocket
terrified I'll drown without
responding

The Serpent's Meat

"...and dust shall be the serpent's meat..."
Isaiah 65:25

An expanse broken only
by the small wooden house
with a chimney

and surrounded by
a reddish thick soupy dust
clogging the air and dampening
the senses:

seeping in the cracks in the wood on the walls,
flavoring our cereal in the morning and
musty kisses exchanged under a creaking ceiling fan at night.

Waking, we find a dusty film and salt flats
weighting our faces and bodies-
wherever the sticky-sweet was leftover

from the night before
when our bodies had arched; hip-bone mountain ranges
rising and falling while
the sun rose and set, scorching every minute
into nothing, and yet

there is something.

There is something
about the dust sparkling on the ends
of your eyelashes, the way it
mixes on my tongue
I spread your thighs,
and I come
away mud-faced,
and you come
away panting.

The dust, mixed with your wetness,
red like war paint-
evidence of my conquering
the landscape,

which is your body.

The valley which rests between the hills
nestled against the expanse of the desert, all
leading to the muddy forest
which is buried between the crevices.

The salt of your earth,
I cannot escape it.

Sailing

in bed at night,
the tenderness of your hands
harbors me-
I am still

I can't see your face
but I know by touch how to
navigate your body

waves and swells, mole
in the half-moon lobe of your ear,
gentle caress

 where sky and
 water converge

the concave dip next to your heart,
with the soft, fine, hairs I stroke
when I lay my head on your shoulder

you cup my breasts
with a gentleness you keep
secreted away until there
is only moonlight

in that moonlight
I ache to melt
into nothing, but your hands
anchor me to the bed
so that I cannot drift
with the ebb and flow

of the winds pulling frantically
at the sails
I sail through the night,
following the stars in your eyes
sails pulled taut,
while your hands tug me,
this way and that.