

A Mother's Fury and Other Poems

A Mother's Fury

Playa Grande, leatherback
built for grace in water, traveling 10,000 miles
of freezing ocean between nestings,
hauls her thousand pounds ashore,
a half hour to trudge from water's edge
to wet sand to dry--finding a space
for massive flippers to dig
with the fury of a mother who knows
her eggs are desired by dogs, plovers,
ghost crabs, monitors, raccoons, coatis--
creatures who agree on little else.
Her midnight excavation watched by
rangers, pilgrims, the only living species
in her genus, *Dermochelys*.

She lays 80 eggs, plus 30 unfertilized--
an offering to predators after hatching,
then carefully covers the site.
She knows she leaves evidence--
her weight, her strain through a night of work.
Before returning to her ocean home,
she wastes a precious hour,
gyroscopes across the sand,
spins the illusion of many nests,
and then resumes her own pursuit.

By day, she follows jellyfish,
waiting for them to rise
up the water column every evening.
She shears them with her perfect scissor jaws--
mostly water, but also protein, collagen,
trying to avoid the masquerade
of delicately dancing ocean plastics,
castoffs that thwart her body's task,
keep her from digesting.

In danger this whole half century,
she casts herself far from city lights,
moving her nests in search
of a space to plant her hope,
spiralling through time and loss and current,
never knowing if her effort will be enough.

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That Kid

Only 4 or 5, already "that kid,"
the one your precious talks about
when asked about her day.

It is as if he was born
without skin--or maybe,
a different kind of skin.
His ridiculous superpower
to feel everything,
hear everything,
take it all in.

The backlash of that power:
the noise of the classroom, too much.
the sound of the pencil,
the discomfort of the seat,
the directions that wind
around themselves, tangled, knotted
like the hair he refuses to brush.

Yes, he is unkempt, annoyed,
with words beyond his years.
He is the one who's not invited
not asked to join.
He knows.

A little girl is kind,
includes him, tells him stories.
Her kindness is the thing he craves.
Six years old, professing love
with all those grown-up words.
The teachers separate them.
What was he supposed to do?
His soft forehead,
blond disheveled curls.
He hurtles them
against the brick
of playground wall
and this is where the line is drawn--
before this time and after.
From here, we'll start
assembling the army
that will try to make him whole.

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Mother Venus

Every morning, you wait there,
hovering above the meadow,
above the stand of pines,
as I pull my robe around me,
shift from bare foot to foot
impatient for the dogs.

You wait on the mornings
when my mind swirls with lists
when I have found myself awake
at one, at three, at five,
ordering and reordering my tasks
You wait on days when I am empty,
when I have nothing to give,
when the pen will not stay in my grip,
when I can not imagine lifting a dish,
when I struggle to think of the sentences
that must be said--later, later.

Maybe you are nothing but patience,
goddess of love and beauty,
hanging low in the morning sky.
Your year, foreshortened by 5 months,
but your day--exhausting,
nearly 9 months
from the sun rising in the West
to the next sunrise,
more than 4 Earth months
of toxic night--your desert surface
867 degrees, your atmospheric clouds
thick with sulphuric acid.
But every Earth day, mother star,
as your volcanoes erupt,
as you endure that long, hot night,
you are here to greet me,
usher me into this day--
no matter what awaits,
and on your surface,
some microorganism struggles to survive
sending phosphane gas into the universe--
desperate signal--you're more than meets the eye.

The dogs return, and I whisper my goodbye to you,
looking for your faint shadows

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as I feed these animals, put away the dishes,
scrub my face, and muster the smile
that will lure my children from their sleep.

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Necessary Magic

Striding into kitchen, playroom, bedroom,
my survey: food stuck on the pot,
clothes strewn on the floor,
paint and Legos spilled.
Piece by piece, I take it on--
not the kind of clean
in houses ever prepped for guests,
but the kind that makes it possible
to go on with your life.

Heavy sleeper as a child--
dreaming as a tree fell on the roof,
scraped its long way down,
beyond my wall,
tearing shingles in its wake--
I became the one whose body rose
from deepest sleep to a need in darkness--
comfort, food or terror.
Became the one who whisked
the gagging child to the bathroom,
knelt beside him, soaked rag in ice,
placed it on a forehead,
quick, no flick of light,
stripped the sweat-soaked bed,
found softest well-worn sheets,
carried child once again to bed,
incanted, hummed and lulled
willing white blood cells
to do their worst,
return the child to health.

Seeming lifetime of necessity,
of scraping pots and pans,
stripping beds and cooling fevers,
sleeplessness and wakefulness
prepared her for the task to come:
the day my child
bashed his head
against the bricks
cried out he didn't want to live.

She calls the doctors,
those who'd put her on a list,
waiting as her child slowly dimmed.

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Do what was required,
find the one who'd see them,
sit quiet as her child bent
to the doctor's spell,
vipers, toads and insects
spilling from his child mouth:
"He frightened me."
"He touched me."
"His hands around my throat."

She wills the room to stop its spin.
Keeps her body still,
incants a spell
to make her heartbeat slow.
When he has finished telling all he can,
she gathers him, smooths hair.
Hums and lulls so he will know
She's planning for what must be done.

Here they sit together
at the bottom of the well.
She searches for a pointed rock
to make the hand and footholds,
carve them over long years.
She is gathering the strength
to carry him on her back
as she plans to scale the wall,
inching them both
toward daylight.

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Beltway

In the passenger seat of the minivan,
this beloved teen, sheen of rage
wiped clean today.

We deliver groceries to doorsteps
of those who rode the Beast,
children strapped to chests,
hoping for more than this--
for health, for work at least--
freedom from gangs
lurking at the door.

Today, this child is again
the one who made us stop
whenever we passed a man
sitting on the sidewalk
handwritten sign--*please*
can we buy him a sandwich,
find out why he's alone?

Deliveries done, the van floats
onto highway, pointed toward our oasis,
green yard, cabinets stocked,
and from the silence

"There are people in all these cars.

They aren't just machines.

Maybe that one in the silver Honda
just filed for divorce.

Maybe the one in the black sedan
just learned he has cancer."

I play along, *"Maybe the Civic*
carries a mourner. eyes red from crying.

Maybe the blue hatchback
carries a baby home, parents
terrified with wonder."

Silence settles over us
except the road noise
the click of the turn signal
and the howl of every person
on this stretch of highway
shaking the car until we have no choice
but to listen to their cries.