

**Torso: Zubrin Athena**

Fists of muscle bristle;

I dwell in the impossibilities  
of your affections, mapping  
the lightyear expanses  
of your sand-dune stomach.  
Earth unties himself from the moon.  
Our many minds' rebellions  
birth the inversion  
of that gravitational impression.

Who next will join us in celestial orbit?

Mars perhaps, in blood-boiled acidity.  
Too long since the gods  
clapped hands on each other,  
so we send slumbering knights  
to conquer his red hills and plant  
the seeds of our ancestors there.

They may one day look up and see  
the distant Earth, and sing  
of our tragedies,  
our mythical name:  
Terra, 'firm land,'  
where firm hands  
held each other's fleshy heavens  
in what was once called sin.

## **Hair: Queen Hippolyta**

Without her princess headdress,  
jango jive do rag,  
mother's bare skull stretched  
like a spotty crust of hilltop,  
clumps of hair left like tall grass  
caught decaying under boulder.  
Tufts still clung where she left them  
to stick from the kerchief--  
stray antennae, strands of memory.

She came downstairs uncovered once,  
emerging earthworm,  
caught me off-guard.  
This mother not mine, this woman  
not known. My eyes  
may have gone wide.

When I was four, I learned to braid  
her waist length cascade,  
touching fibers of being, feeling part  
of this sacred woman's universe.

After chemo, it grew in  
gray and brittle, like a brillo scrub.  
She chopped it to military attention.  
Now, it drapes like the wired mail of a knight,  
clinking over shoulders, shining with frost.

Nothing can enter.  
She is dressed for battle.

## **Hands: God**

Then, when money was tight, my father declared ‘Tuesday night is Pasta night!’ He heaped flour in the center of the counter wiped clean, cracked eggs from my mother’s hens down into the powder volcano, and beat them, slowly, olive-burnt arm following the rigid flick of the fork. The house would fill with white dust, as if each room was an egg enveloped by dough.

During this, I would sit on the stool next to him, as he fed the powdery scarves into the squeaking pins of the pasta machine. I was responsible for the crank. “Slower,” he would say to me, “be careful.” Like magic, the fields of dough grew, each rolled ribbon cut in half before being flattened again, then sliced into needle slim limbs.

Finally, it was hung to dry on the laundry rack, which stood like a stranger on the kitchen floor, while the water boiled. He would tell me of the way he learned this expanding process-- living in Manhattan, walking each day past an Italian restaurant. Embedded in the wall was a window, and inside, a woman, as old as you could imagine, hunched over her hillock of flour, her pasta crank, her whisper-white eggs. He never saw her do anything else but roll dough.

Now, I tell my friends the way I learned this ancient concoction, watching my father. I peer through that small window of memory to those snapshots of him, hulking like a full horse in the blank light of our kitchen, stirring the eggs. I do not let me see the periphery, the what is not seen.

Eventually, I will teach my children to mound flour, crack eggs, knead dough. I will tell them of the wide, piano-hands that would splay about my shoulders, and I will let them turn the crank, saying “Slow. Slow. Slow.”

## **Skin: When Finally Narcissus Disturbed the Water**

Ichthyosis is a family of disorders characterized by dry or scaly and thickened skin. “Ichthy” comes from the Greek word for fish. This condition is called “ichthyosis” because the thickened skin sometimes has the appearance of fish scales.

-NIH

No flower petals here,  
just these suicidal sandpaper scales.  
My grandfather filleted the fish  
and fit me in the skin.  
*Ichthyosis*, a diagnosis  
that juts like the longest line of a short poem.

I was wrong.  
Hair--wrong--long  
Body--wrong-- gaunt  
Voice--wrong--wan

At school, they ooh and ahh,  
a queue of them to touch the grit,  
see it crinkle, the white clutch  
shunted off a dying birch.  
Show them the unaching scars  
as if I received these  
symboled marks  
for their breath only!  
To touch  
but not to feel.

Do they recognize me  
in each new skin suit?  
Rioting roots  
beneath the bed,  
air around me  
polluted by my dead?

Have you consumed me yet?

I die faster and faster  
day by day.

## **Flesh: Like Ink on the Underside of Heaven**

*4 and 20 blackbirds baked in a pie...*

as the needle's eye looks for mincemeat inside.  
Who knew they could all fit?  
Paper roses, unfolding  
a thousand times over, from  
plant to blue to needle's plow  
across the blank hayfield of my leg.  
They're coming up for me.  
How do they see through  
such black lenses?  
The crow's sense  
is underestimated  
at the estimator's expense.

"What will you name her?"  
the tattoo sorceress says to me,  
tickling my thigh like a baby's,  
while the crow's belly  
with its tender sheet  
inches over my shy body.

*The crows have no names.*  
-Whose saying?

Quoted on the umbrella  
of the yellow salt girl.  
We never bought her round again  
after my father's lover  
told us she was the model.  
Crow's eyes unsuspect,  
so you can  
suspect again.

She's made it over my chest,  
nipples a smudge,  
disappearing towards my inside  
horizon, hairy skies.  
My skin repeating itself,  
black limb on black limb  
making what white is left glow alien,  
the splintered web of moon  
at the bottom of a black well.

the punk poet tattoo lady  
has a mother's unbreaking touch.  
The crow's wing brushes  
the nape of my neck.  
I'm drowning in them.  
Crows don't down,  
their baby feathers  
are never found.