

When It Found Me

I

Incubus

Slipped under the door,  
out of nowhere  
sneaky and spineless,  
wrapped around my throat  
and pulled hard.

The Greco-Roman gods summoned to class  
by Mrs. Broadhead looked down horrified  
that I would cry in their presence when I loved them so.  
At 10 just running down the hall  
with you slithering up my back  
around my just formed breasts  
covering my mouth and stealing my breath  
like a cat in a crib.

After that you took up shelter in my spine  
twitching your tail and hissing in my ear  
biding your time.

At 21 in college hiding in the bathroom  
you in my brain beating a refrain  
I don't know why  
I don't know why  
I don't know why  
I don't want to go to a surprise  
birthday party that's no surprise.  
I know everything that will happen  
and everything that won't.  
I read it all in the mirror. It's all too sad.  
This tile is cool and I can't fall any further.  
I've been down so long it looks like up to me.

Do you always do that? asked the doctor.  
What?  
Not look people in the eye.  
I don't do that. I don't know that I do that.

Do I?

II

Hey Boo

And now, I'm fine mostly,  
but don't think I don't see you  
behind the door, Mr. Radley,  
waiting for me to take your hand  
and walk you home in the dark.  
You don't fool me. I love you but  
you are nothing but trouble.  
You're a grown man now;  
walk your own damn self home.

## Cutting Down the Last Tree in Connecticut

The grey water was close to the road. Any higher  
and it might have washed away altogether, as if  
we'd never come this way or could ever find our way back.

We went by the small white church that is no longer  
a church and brown fields of pumpkins waiting  
in a purgatorial mist for the final frost.

We dragged the tree down the hill along a path of smoke  
rising from a warming shed, the grandchildren  
trailing behind like wayward pallbearers  
tucking the falling pine cones into their pockets.

## Sylvia and Assia

I wonder if Sylvia and Assia were to meet today for tea  
whether the former would accuse the latter  
of lack of imagination. After all, there are so many ways  
to kill yourself other than sticking your head in a gas oven.

Or perhaps she would see Assia's choice  
as poetically derivative, an homage  
grudgingly paid after six long years of living  
under the bell jar of Sylvia's ghost house.

Would the two women parse the difference between living  
with Ted's insane decisions on the one hand  
and his insane indecisions on the other or debate which made more sense -  
to take your child with you to death or to leave your children behind to live?

Or maybe they'd just be sick and tired of the whole subject  
and want to enjoy the scones and clotted cream.

## Just Try Me

Before we play  
I just want you to know  
I know some things.  
I'm good at lying and bluffing  
and holding grudges  
and burning bridges  
and taking hostages.

I'm an arsonist.  
I've got a match  
here in my hand  
I can strike  
on the zipper  
of my jeans  
any time I want.

We're playing with my deck now  
and I've got some tricks up my sleeve.  
I've got an ace of tears  
tucked behind my ear  
and a king of fire  
in my back pocket  
just itching to be played.

I can make myself small  
before you can make me feel small.  
I can keep a secret. I would tell you  
but just remember what I told you  
before you say you want to hear it.  
I'm playing the queen of truths now.  
Now trump that.

## Hemingway's House

That first night on Key West  
we ate dinner under the stars  
in the garden of Hemingway's house.  
It was cold even for January  
but warmer than most places  
we were from, which we described  
taking turns around a large white table  
reflecting what light was left in the night sky.

It made me think that if there were  
an evolutionary poetry scale  
I would still be swimming  
in the primordial shallow end,  
thinking about growing some arms and legs,  
while others would be standing erect drinking cocktails  
around Hemingway's green pool  
which Elizabeth Bishop loved so much

and in which I yearned to plunge  
that first night on Key West.