

devil

I fear I will be too light and this wind will blow me away
It tugs me toward the unknown and yet I see

I still have fear

remember this fear

shake little leaves

rain pelt tongue

never felt so good to be out of the rain!
the dark plume hovering over my ghost

Chunya

At the park I always went to as a child, I saw tonight
the small grave of one who must have fell from a height
I'd have no trouble scaling as a grownup. The grave
was gaping, and I wasn't really sure whether it'd
been a work in progress or just vandalized. I tried
not to look at the hole between the tree's two roots.

The pictures of the child were bleached by the sun.

Tell me, August

Light!

Bring from the spat between my two souls
victory, consummate—to say that I Am
what, exactly The seed of our strife The
grace that the God above would not grant.
We gathered in dirt, but cursed the knelt sun
who threw our shadows and split us. I
Remember when we wrought at noon and
from the soil that we held to light in two paws
raised by ourselves the dough to feed flame

so wet, the red tongue. I could not know
how humid the grain-destroying blaze
burning in a snowscape after fall's end
nor how many grains to ash.

.
. .

Myself I won from, myself I ruined
by the dry, trickling grain
and burnt remains—the dust
kicked up with racing foot—to rise

and reach the ring of apples, hanging from the cliff's edge.
I saw the red and the green
and the black—cast off my shadow
to whatever below—and into the branches

Leapt. Bending arms supported me

the hiss of green leaves
a slow, twirling plunge
and the chafed crown
nurturing the apples. One
fell to my paws, glowing
as it rubbed against my cheeks
whispering
undress the red veil

and mist and screams and the globs.
I sipped the juice it foamed white
until gold dripped and leaked and ran
across my cheeks and on my lap
it lap it lap it la pit a pit A PIT BELOW

The devastated lower. The flower's
shriveled hairs. You think a bee
felt it first and let the fruit grow?
more gratitude than envy, then
my mouth was stuffed with skin
flags that fly on each breath
until the flesh reduced to pulp.

Two fingers held the apple—one
on the bottom, another on the stem
lapping both ends, stirring
the dead lands. Those wells remember
rush—the nectar that bent low
so low the hairs for the bees to lap
light from the stem that broke the flower
pumped the blood that swells
the apple red before its body
bows the cord. Dusty home of
Spiders, stogged hole—thank you
Without you, there would be no

Vertical life.

Rise, my tide

Dug to the core between the two poles,
cradled in a crescent bough whose nook
held the leaves mosaic on the apple
running past the thin support. My body

on the branches. My left paw held
the apple and threatened to throw it
Straight down that cliff. I was sick
sick! my lower eyelid obscures you,
apple...your flesh from a flower
self-pollinated, containing only
sourness and imagined sweets.

When you were brought to my face, I saw
myself, eaten by the first bite. I couldn't
taste the sweetness others fell for. My kind
was split from sweet, sentenced to wheat...

The apple hated how I tasted, too.
red like itself, white like itself
rending—and cast into a pit as dark
to dwell in a pool of dead hopes
with all my light-bedecked glories
that dull and wilt under my bed.

It fell. Both paws were freed, but my body
rocked from the toss and rocked
the branches. I could have balanced
if I'd limped. Instead, I tried to steady myself
dumbass...heaving left as the branch
swayed left—and right, as the branch did like
and I toppled from the tree, from the cliff

to a breeze to a wind to a storm that
hurled me under the clouds, within
directionless. My limbs soon steadied
and my tail hanged me, pointed up

THAT'S up?!

The clouds thinned to the wide blue strip
bounded by a second cloud pool.

Free and falling, I dreamt of endless
cloud pools, plunged into a vast cake
until I saw a dark seed. It grew
and grew—and soon grew limbs
and a tail, until the figure approached
myself, tricked by the still seas
as I saw the image of the Ninth
Pretender, rising to meet
my crashing wave. Dodging, I swayed
and he swayed to catch. I defended myself
with claws—and he unsheathed to kill me

And we met.

I couldn't feel him
as the sea blacked me out and swallowed
the brackish water forced through...bitter cake.
sleep-inducing cake. How heavy, how deep
the abandon I woke to, whose only current
lungs and a slow, sinking tunnel. I am below,
so far below
without a way
but black, drifting downward to
Befriend—already, I see its long
tendrils on my belly, winding up
my neck, dancing as I grab it to find
nothing but a torn shadow—fuck

my own tail...

oh, I'm just

impatient. This darkness numbs the eye,
unrests the hand. And though seize not sky
here's endless and blue enough. Maybe if I
reach the absolute floor—hah, groundless
Hell, sunken well—yet within me holds
some darker soil
and a promise to turn this sea
a sea of fertility.

fall's end

YOU who casts the stage and turns
the page, can I call upon you
unblamed? or will you turn your light, stopped by my
trespass absolute and the trailing
onus

...I hate these heavy words. Or
Are they bigger in thought than act? then
maybe light. After all, who knows my
shame? and as the bottle lowered and the flow
of flame was corked with paws

who sighed, them
or me? Light, I could eat their blame
but never my own memories
hanged above my neck—nor the force
that bows it low—nor the coals
that scorch the clay, a drive that
drives to newer drives—and will
reclaim my crown in gilding flame—to claim
perfection now and then. Last life

Nine, but never enough for I
am time and time defeated
by greater and greater heirs
Of flame—who will never let us die
with a single gray hair. So bow our necks
Ninth Cat from the New World
shadow that casts itself. Do you see

me, the Eighth to be consumed? NINE
our tastes were alike. We shared our tracts
shared the same food until our stomachs

burst—and even in the aftermath, you felt
a greater thirst to fill the jugs and the cup
thrown against the floor. And as you threw
me in the oven—in that 8.5
I gazed up at you, curious:

How could you?

And you said

EIGHT,

A quivering neck sways upon the wind
and burns like dry summer sheaves. Hear
the heated cracks and whispered words
until deaf with smoke and thunder and rain
that seeps through the cracked soil and the
thick ash veins, watered heavy and dark
when the bunkered roots below
drink and writhe

and chew ancestral clay—the fields that quench
our hearse. better than to eat from men, so filled
with them from spring. we were beautiful then
we grains—adorned with indigo

held in our ears. The men so loved us
the ground was stuffed. We kissed their eyes
like sorghum, their knives and guns
utensils on the banners. Now,

Autumn noon—disperse the
clouds. Let grass chase the light
And cover the dreg heap—and
calm at dusk—and rise again
with a greater life than green
When the last flower eclipses
grass in the moonlight
stars to the bloodbloomed Nine

Rising from the petals, forming
plots to cook a cake
out of poor, poor Eight...oh no!

The mellow fire licks him dry.
whip and foam the egg and dough
marbled whorls of layered loaves.
leaves of thyme, I must refrain—

but the oven cooks so slow!
peeling soft from the bone
shall they ache when never old
too fast!! don't you see the curling

ashy hairs? brown crackling skin
burst veins? as blood congeals
turning cog and wheel? vicious turn
spoke the self-consuming king—

COMBUST, till the soil

is ground fresh to roasted grains of black
and the tower cuts the smoke like cake
powdered with ash from the urn of fakes.
Send the pastry on the river. He will pass to god
without a wake and put to waste
our twining cords of shame. Soon
there'll be wheat to reap and germ to crush
Let us grow wheat! cast the flowers
on the grave. We could not burn them..
remember when we kissed with flame
the weeping heads of poppy? even
the sun slept then!! No, just keep him
Petal-smothered. That will suffice. He'll be
buried with beauty—the glowing gentian
and blossom-ropes of woodvines
so like the yarn he once pawed at

knots undone. The hands of Eight
are caked white with soda, was once
the cook himself...now, his dry snow
inflames to mist. The river rubs the grave
smooth, carries the fruits and leaves
the rock and scaleless fish—blank
obituary, bodied and laying—no, lying
to myself, for there's no body to burn
but thought—or nobody gave a thought
or mind forgot not. but I think him a goner
for the tail and ears are flopped, perhaps still
alive? but quick get off get off

Ten is on his way

Hearth dream

bright between the grass, a beetle
passes, lights the green
yellow. I am warm and tickled
when it flits—peeped me lying, did you?
Even washed my fur with spit...beetle, you must know
how I got here—why, below
A wet bed of petals and stems. Once,
They were bright with dew. Now, they
run with decadence—a pale
bouquet of slag, dead two months
though it feels like ten...rise, me!
forget all, and stand upright with glo
ow ow my two soles! prepared for rest,
you lazy pair—WRONG!! rush to it...for here
Is a river. Here are trees. And here
below, a ruined flowerbed. Here...take
three steps forth and slow, and the static
burns like moss off a stone. The bushes
glow with red currants, and my fur
smells of dead flowers and
a pungent musk on my tail—
bathe, you filthy.

I still don't know...why everything feels familiar.

On the bank I bent and peered
scattered and faint, carried
away by currents, framed by ferns
and knotted roots supporting
the leaves and hanged berries...there,
below even the roots

Mysteries grow, oddest fruit. In them
I washed myself. Still, a strange musk
without a visible source. My fur is
empty, maybe oiled with something
else—cleansed only with heat
my lazy heart lacks. Defeated, I drink
the strong currents that pull my tongue
and spell the questions—where
the stream leads. To a delta? or
straight out to sea? or a turning
wheel that feeds the mill...and if
a mill, then grain...and if grain—
home!

Memories of home! home!

memories of home...

Memories. Of home.

There, I think I was
thrown from the attic window, rolled off
Shirtless! with the bed!! pried
and rent off the window frame
slashed with deep marks—eh
at least I'm freed from debts.

I dwelled
behind the blinds, stabbed between
their shadows. When was I allowed
down without violence? The attic...
double-roomed and bridged below
by the shaky ladder. Only as a child
did I have a sound home—and soft
buttery eyes that averted their gaze
from the hearth, afraid of its visions—fire

there for the curious, still divorced
from pain. The warm autumn room

with tea and maple. On the windowsill
snail pies and braids of dough, glazed
with the amber panes—unbaked. Here
the oven waited to lend its warmth
productive little love.

do you remember
sister? when our furs were floured with wheat
you clapped little clouds and plunged
your paws in the bowl. Entranced, I laid
with a left fat cheek drooling on the paper
like floured dough—catty cake, catty cake!
and woke with my clasped pen to write the
verse that seemed like rods to careen and curve, contrived too long and bent
over the soft rug. And if I pressed too hard...
the pen would go through and spill all
over me—go on, LAUGH! My black paws
‘ll never stain...stupid sister, you ran
from the potted pansies, staring them off
with your flattened ears and black fur
blackier than the flowers...a mirror
could’ve scared you more. We were both
rude to darkness. I carried that stain
until I bathed, and you fled from the pansies
until you sniffed them. But what led me
to the bath—and you, to the pansies’
fragrance? What led us—who, who?
we knew her and knew her...mother!
mother!
mom...

she carried us from the litter
and our twining cords. As kits, we fed
from her six paps. Her soil-black fur hid
such white milk—and after feeding us
she licked off our whiskered drips, and
when we grew sturdy bellies for wheat

wiped the porridge off our cheeks in August...

August,

book of summer holiday. Dizzy noon, light
pooling on the grass, flowing up the lawn
at evening—even gravity was lazy, then...
there flowed from the sun a sea
squeezed from the summits, lemonade

then amber. We returned at dusk to find the last log
ashes. And as the sun knelt
peering through the gate, our shadows
touched the hearth. At night
by the candle, they shriveled—danced on the walls
until there were none. But did we

Hear the light? Its warning—its cry as it pulled us
to the hearth? soon came
November's prologue. Sister, you stole away
the sun..you grew, and your sleek black coat
bore the ice like white hairs, leaving
the door ajar

and the cold. we hoped

HOPED you back, mother and I
until the flakes grew. Where you went
where you took the sun—sister we
left our prayers, plunged to the deep
and trod. I held mom's hand
when the crystals blinded me. followed
Your snow-scattered prints, each

pointing to the next, as we pushed the storm...rainy mother your face is grainy, I
wished for a better memento yet I
squinted when December blew
Your ashes across my face and

Into my mouth yes it poured
the grain urn. Sister you LED us to the frosted ladder
of the silo. And we came up
 Were your paws numb as well?
 stood beneath
the hailing metal roof The ground felt solid
Around the border but mom, you sought
her—there, in the center you carved
the shadow of your daughter from the veil and loosed
your grip
to chase the shimmering darkness, the
groundless wheat, so soft it swallowed.did
Did you meet her? at the TRUE center
so deep below. The more
the more you struggled the more
the more the grains gave chase. I
I could have tried
tried? No, even
reunited. But I chose to stay.

Toys with me

Return to the kit who lost his two souls
who wanders the soil, hardened to crust
that neither breaks nor trickles
and wonders, when to dust
when he heard—

YOU,

the thin film you walk. A silken cloth, or
tarpaulin—when will you return to bed?

come peek under this teal sheet,
cozied by the blanket's heat,
beneath the teal the quilt reveals
the thick and glowing mantle
vestments of the core unseen
plumes of coal and pumping gold—
rock was not fecund before.
pitch turned pure by the rays
rings by the August light
together, joining hands. First came
mauve, the world's new toy
then came the other hues
Rainbows of the Tyrian Dawn
the Ancient Procession
shadows that follow you.
primal beings walk the Earth
plastic spawn imbued with life,
marching forth till all has di

di-di-did I scare you? look at your face!
not a ghost—just a white cover!
got it from the laundry, still warm.
here, I'll put it over you-
hey, not with us both —
that tickles—orry, I'm sorryaha!

pff

Up my sleeves

Come water. Exhaust the flame that burns
the page—only a dip. I won't tread
the river, won't dilute the ink. Drips
of fog over the autumn dawn, blues
amurk. Guiding, warm currants. Walking
the purple path of lanterns, casting
shallow pools of shade. Dirty soles
wet with layered cakes of maple
trickling warm, loosed from the branch
Fall surprised us. We held before
then—unstirred and still. October falls
a scythe. October—the heavy pour of
leaves, faring flows of maple—before
The solitude.

winter. Numbed, lazy soles to shady
Wade. Wrinkled, moist toes. Fall,
you leaves. Politely fall—left
or right to pass? excuse us, we'll leave
A wake of maple, stroking your fur
With an orange brush—syrup
syrup! our coalesced souls
Detached...we lost our store of light
and trail before trunks. In mud, we fear
the hot sun—we crisp on the ground, or
Rot...the beetles tickle us!!

The beetles tickled me, too. They crept
On my soles, submerged in glowing pools
fleeing from my step—until one of them
Rose, brighter and brighter—and flew onto
my nose. I think I remember you. What
a brave bug, to peep on me twice...returned
with that glow, have you? I didn't want
to drool in front of you...it's embarrassing
To see you again. But your light is calm
compared to your friends below—it's, well
incandescent. But why are you here again?

My eyes remember you, but my nose
Faintly...some musk, concealed
in the cut grass. It feels all familiar.
The beetle, the grass—everything.

I still don't know
How here...why, before
The same bed I woke from. did I follow

a loop? but the river...is it just a cycle?
the rocks are the same ones that I
woke to, whistling the same song
through the same grass. Let me
hear the loud song

louder, tread before the current's
spittle and roar—around the fragrances
of grass—wheat?—and the disguised musk.

There, over the field. I smell the source.

Who cut the grass? who
The gardener who lets the clippings rot

On the bed I woke from...why?
I only stepped on it with dirty paws
to rise. But now, I fall back
into the grass and hidden petals. Fall
with dirtier soles. Who wishes me
To fall? They're in my bed, waiting.

They hid themselves in grass. Soon I'll
fall and turn and toss—and reveal
The gardener of this world. Now
Where are you, jailer? between
the ashen remains and petals defiled
and the potent musk of the snake
connected from mouth to tail

Where are you, magician? You
You have made the forest my bed
and snare to rest in. I remember, Light!
You warned me in my childhood dreams
The coiling log with red, pumping
beneath the white scales and shedding
skins of ash, cooped in the hearth. I

remember...didn't I hear the hiss on green
scales, when I was lured by the apples?
over burnt fields of rattling wheat as the
thunder forked above, bringing home
the Ninth—split, self-consumed, roused
undead. I am the fallen half, who
dodders around the rotting wood
awaiting dust—hollow, still toyed with
still consumed by the snake's curse
on the river, whose source
gorges its own tail, the steady channel of spells
I break you. I break you. I BREAK you. My two paws

seize you SNAKE left on head, right on tail
spanning your body. With a grip, I pull
Wrench. Yet so deep your jaws
so fat, the tail entrenched that even
claws make no progress. You'll force
Death on your stubborn neck, as
exhausted of all other choices
it beckons for the last cut. Yes
to tear and halve, just as your tongue
forked me—split me—tendon from bone—

Just as it forced me on myself.

Let your ends meet But your fat belly
your dinner passes through
how many times, tail to mouth cycled?
burden of black soil Let me free you
from its contents Let me
bite the tender tomb oh it floods
waters with no remains. You were
bloated with waters, famished—waiting for
me, to carry within? and now, you
writhe and leak that musk
blossoms as the jaw loosens

The bloody tail—and after all your coughs
you STILL moan and beg for relief? I'm weakening
your scales by rolling them. Bark off logs
and from the wound peel back the folds
till I unravel them like FRAYED KNOT
you stringamozzarella! you fluff of cotton
yarn-despooled tummy
burst, pool of red, furry
wool of doll, full of pie

no more porridge for me don't
scurry snake don't flail don't
don't

don't play with your food!
it's all over your cheek.
here, get a napkin—wait
why's it red? Oh, just bit your mo

Our honor and our loss.
We were lions once. So we say
and tell—that we can still return
With pride

mom! mom, show me the tree again?
and walk on the cords from our navel. The
Higher the leaves, the taller tales we tell
Dead pride. The only remnant
is latent power, dreadful force
that knows no toil but might
without address. For in the gold
churned in a lion's heart, crowned by the mane
heaps the first dark soil
urned in the goblet of giants
forgotten, but not snuffed
completely. For in the fossil remains
the thirst to immolate—the heat-red
blush in dark fur, concealed
by the cat's creed—the arms to cool
love's ardor beneath, our thin
coat of domesticity—painted seal
of patchwork. Lovely portrait, but when something
HAPPENS, what should I bow to
but my own chimeras, own shadows

NO MORE. I am freed freed
from your serpent's dance. You have

no more rhythm—only desperate attempts
at revenge, torn and leaked
And shackled by your trailing scales.

Waking from the dream, a hot yawn
escapes me, flows down my cheeks
and pools. I float above the dark
mosaic of leaves. twitch twitch—
The slither and splash is near. Snake...
Would you like my tail? take it—bite.
You can't hurt me anymore. I can't stay.
The ring is broken. I embrace your wound
up body—and feel nothing but a squeeze
When you braid with my tail—ah it swells
as if you loved it and waltzed with it a last
rite on the ruinous scales with a swirl
over the breaking deluge as your wound
spoke. Here remains in deserted occult
your head that held the streams. Exhausted
of spells, you loosened the grip
on my tail too many partings and looked
still and unwinded until you cast another
Breath and again a wind, stronger
and stronger as your breaths were stirred
with speech and you spoke your first words
to your last:

I am just a snake.

what the Snake said

lonely in this forest, I
found a friend
piled under a heap of flowers. So
they drew me. But what else above
but a dreamer who pinned him down
Asleep—you, who holds him even now!

I wished for his freedom. And what
could a serpent do but choke you
to death? I prayed and loomed close
until my friend
came to your defense and spoke that he
and you were one. And so, I let you go
And my friend lowered.

I could live without your flesh, but I
conceived in my cavernous folds
space for you. As the flowers
putrefied, I stayed and fed you berries
and kept you wet by the currents
In hopes of a soothing dream.
I plucked the rotting petals from your fur
and when the berries were not enough,

I found the wheat that would make you
well. They rattled, the sighing stalks—I had not known
how many could array—how powerful the scythe

how many could be undone—and how
frightened the mice, caught between fang
and blade—how surprised they were, as I held
the grain in my mouth and gave them no care—
and how vengeful they were for their lost ones
When they surrounded me and ground
my scales dull, hopeful that their kin
were still alive and growing
in my belly. I broke from their teeth
and swelled—yet still returned to the fields
to carry the wheat that would make you
well. As I fed you, my friend wagged more
sleeked with a darker gloss--warm.

We held together in those cold nights
that tightened our braid—and found
the glow that god could not grant
joined by the flame, for in your black fur
Brightness, like a late summer's daze.
You and my friend—your portraits with me
brought to the fields where we toiled
together. Today, I dallied, wondering
when you would wake—and when
my friend would stretch freely, so many things
unknown...your bodies rising from the bed
your gaits when you took your first few steps
how long you would stay, how long we'd say
farewell...just then, in my heart spoke
your portraits, their voices as I imagined

We will stay with you

We'll always stay with you!

I was happy...relieved. that day, I
stuffed the grains and almost choked
and, returning with a heavy head
Heaved back to the woods, fast to the stream

That led me back. But when I
returned to the source, I found only
your warm impressions on the bed
Gone. And with you, my friend. Gone.
Vanished! look below, these grains
I spat...where did you go?

The river rushed past, without me.

But I knew you. Somehow. I knew
you'd follow that purple path—and knew
there was a chance I could lead you home, but not
without unnatural force
using my own body as a channel, offering
the grass—the power to make the stream bow
and ring itself to my wish: to rescue the both of you. And
Soon enough, you came..! my friend
hid behind you—curling, then standing up
straight. You came close—and you held me
as if you knew how to hold me. Did I
brush up on you on accident
when curling with my friend—
were you envious? did my friend
tell you when you woke, or are you
both bound in dreams? You held me
like I did when I fed you.

Did you want me?

there ran your flickering tongue
and soon, your mouth opened
me up...how sharp you were
your wide and globed pupils
constricted to slits...I remember
feeding that very mouth.

oh, you poor kit..

I have no milk to offer, no matter
how you hiss, afraid. Do you see beyond
the ring I made? the winds, now rising
tousling your stiff red fur? today too, the forest
opens. But why did you wake up? why
did you leave this nest? why—did the breeze
wake you from your nightmares? did you see
In them, the way I possessed you? I forgot
how to be alone. Was that what did it?

I don't know...you gave my friend warmth
and still do. But when his time is up
My kit, please take his life more softly.

why don't you ever show mom
the scary face you show me?

yeah, I guess it is a secret
between you and me. ah
you did it again! one day
I'll show her—then you'll be
fit for a hissing down!

WO

The blood stilled. The snake died
and I—did I have the right to touch you? to
lift you out of that pool, onto my bed
of flowers? to hide your wound with the slag
and guilt? I still hear your voice
on your lips that touched my tail
and my neck

you...with grain
nursed in the cradle your own killer
grave tender who'd last lain in the
rotting flowers dusted white in the
gathered grass could burn
could burn a pyre—but couldn't
do it again. couldn't move the airs
around you...you? you kept me there
At home.

the Ninth tucked my tail in the oven. Below
the sea, there wanders an ashen cat
the Eighth, who was not the last to rule
nor the first...you, if you knew MY tally
you would have strangled me, snake—even
a lass as kind as you. So far from Zero
as the Eighth. I remember when I killed
Seven and even in my height knew
that I'd die the same way. But who
was Nine? I almost forgot until your
death and the smell of your death

and your your tail, pulling back the pages
Letting the streams unknot.
Where I buried Seven—was it a grave

or cradle? though three months passed
this page is still wet with ink. Your blood
unstuck it from the last and found for me
his bed, fluffed with dolls and fragrant rose
Undead like me, sleeping for two months
Like me—and now, it's mine. This bed

Right here.

Did I see another when September buried
August—all along? It was you, Seven. You
killed me with the same voice as Nine. you,
September. You took revenge, whispering
that I was the wheat
that buried us both
December, we burned

Mom, the soil was hard. After you died I
burned the grain-pile. Did you hear the silo
pounding? there were
rainbows, then. And then, they
stilled to a rough snow. I saw this all
but sister, where were you
that December night? did you stay
with mom in the burning bed? or
did you bear the winter, feeling a faint warmth
behind you, so far behind?

that pin of light...
that was us, mother and I.

The low star, birthed in the blank snow
Mom. After the night, an ice-ring
crowned her. Sister, I know you saw
And hated me for it. Mom, mom
tell her to stop...she stalks me as my shadow

turns the wheel that kills me every month.
I thought she was the Ninth but really
she made us all from 0. On the new year
she sowed the kernels—Nine, Seven—who
kills me, is killed by me—each pursuing
the other's tail. She set the year in motion.
As Eight, I was August. And now, I am
October...I see you, Nine. See your neck. But
I'd rather sleep—longer, longer..

am I delaying

fate? to be Ten, and rise again? is it October's duty
to kill Nine, and all those at odds? to
collect the shards, repair the glass
and raise the inverted verses until
the tongue is dried, immune to taste? I can't—the dream
Is gone, and for all I dreamt the snake
Is still dead. And even if I rise, my wobbly
knees are still on the river's edge
ready to take your life and mine
where the river leads—ready to walk
once more along the wobbly waters
where, I wonder. Snake...you were kind
to give me warmth and a bed to sleep in
to repay your love, I lowered and bent

and broke your scales...some horrible child who feeds and feeds—how could I
deserve freedom? from her, from all of this? she protected me—loved me—and I
brought death into her house. Could I
tend to her garden? wash the rot and hide the blood
when even the currents blush?

I can't see the filth within my dark fur
only the river could make me clean.

Before I go, I'll wash your bed—
sorry, sorry sorry sorry

and come again...when the months
decay again. until again...I'll return
I promise to tend your grave. Soon
the bees will spring from you, but I can't stay
in meadows of murmuring water. I'll keep
my knees apart and my feet straight
on the path that you revealed to us
remembering when the branches
knotted up my sight...now, they fall
as if they'll rot with you. Now, I see
light. Now, the fog flees—and then
the blue.

Mom, I didn't know the forest could be
This warm—with the salt breeze and
moist breath and the smell of molding
leaves and the mushrooms
how the puny foster in dark water
The big stench by the sun's warmth
Until blown away by sudden roars
That bite my fur and tear the branches
And bark from trees, which scatter
above, where leaves the rays of light.

decimate

Roars through the trees again. Echoes
of the lapping waves. Wind-tousled fur.
Forest clearing, sun beyond the clouds
Afternoon. The shallowed estuary
Now reflects nothing and runs out
to the ocean. I leaned

drawn by that immensity—and saw
the reflection without horizon
perfect gray pools on the other side
mirror the white cliffs that I
fell from, the sea that brought me
to this island—and the Ninth
who dragged me to its Center. Breaking
waves and noisy flows. Vulgar blue.

Each wave pursued the other, pursued
by the other. Chained, the foaming tides
feral on the white cliffs above the woven
clouds on the quilt sea. The soul in every stone
heard the insufferable scrape
as earth fled from earth, heaven labeled hell
and raised our towers, felled the skies
and the gnash—the chasm that yawned
life to this world, ten thousand tides worn
walking on the shore to the scentless sea
where not a single shell remained.

I knew I'd see you on the shore,
falling like I did—washing on the shore
like I did—waiting to be killed
and immolated and dragged into
this island's Center like I should
your fur in the distance like a seed.
With each step, I saw you grow
into a flower—dried, broken, uprooted
but so close to the waves.

Another step.
You opened your petals.

In fall? You desired nothing but water
to wet my ashes. At night, you
smoldered. But when morning came, you
tucked and shied. The sun revealed
Your darkness. You found no pollen
and held none within. Your dress
drops and withers and, coming closer
I see your dried veins. Closer. Let me
grab you—

Happy birthday!—what?
you weren't born on August
but October, middle of fall...
I know you've always wanted
this. it's under your bed

go look and see!

and fall on you, afraid
and weary. Grabbed your neck
repressed an urge to bite it. Your veins
won't pulse, and your mouth isn't frothing.

you're still, but warm. An empty bed
with the scars I'd given you before—the ones
I gave when you were Seven. You

breathed

and put your paws on my face Your claws
worn with grave-digging Your fingers
stroking me until I raised my head. Your reach

was short, and yet you
touched my face
and my tears
our mother's flesh
her sticky ash
and mine. All flowed

on your face. I held your neck
harder and your eyes took my tears
until they blanked. I held
as the tide increased and built its foam
bubbling on the sand. I held
as the sun bent over us both—fall my sun
and you flattened under me. I held
my breath on your still fur
crossed feet until you choked
and opened your eyes
and your curious mouth
and twiddled your nose. And still I
held you—like this—until you whispered

why
do you hold off?
You shivered as I fell and fell next to you.
I couldn't raise myself—couldn't stand

burning in November, though I deserved it.
But I couldn't leave her
in the meadows of murmuring water. Don't you
agree? Nine, sister—whoever you are.

You shuffled when I submitted to you.
Would you rise above me, secure
your place above? would you force me
again
to a shadow?

.
. .

when the shuffling stopped, I knew
you wouldn't. That you agreed. We
turned to see each other, curled
with our paws touched, mirrored
interlaced. We stared until our heads
touched, then closed our eyes
noses touched and nuzzled
mixing tears with flowers with raised paws
that slid to our napes and hugged
And hugged
until the claws drew blood. The heat
do you remember? beyond
that burning silo and the kiln
beyond all that, there sat
in the heart of an unlit home

our sad hearth, tucked in the August scrapbook
filled with pressed pansies. Do you?

We opened our eyes as siblings, smiling
As the waves lapped our toes. Covered

With salt, tickled by the sea, we rose
and sat on the sand. As the sun rolled
beneath the clouds, we met its gaze as it fell
slow to the sea. Could you tell
when it fully set,

Light?

This is our end, but you may rest here
too, if you'd like. We must tend to her grave
and kindle the hearth.

*They snuffed their flames
beneath the sand, paws
plunged in the isle of blue wakes
and coming winter nights.
they will dance in the dark
the meadow waits for them
the grave and hearth await*

Not all was lost, not all was gained.

*they will dance in the dark, each
each other's guide. But here
they draw their paws close
and the feeling of another
shakes their breaths. Then
with their voices wan and soft
they wondered, when to dusk.*

Jerdarious Dotorg



