

DIGGING FOR TURNIPS IN THE MULTIVERSE

The first question went like this:

The sound of water
Falling on a parchment of dirt
Briefly spells a message meant to be understood bodily.

No harm in resting in a quilt of blood,
If that blood be your own.

Light-centuries away, stars are climaxing (the way things go)

And the daffodils, deaf as a stone,
Nod their heads in affirmation,
Send shoots of electricity clamoring through space.

A giant toad lurks over the known universe,
Disproving our theories again and again.

So much to see. So much to see see see.

I wasn't even lonely
Until you were born.

MY VULVA IS A SHADOWY COURTYARD

In a city of passwords. This is my time
To not be a ghost. I intend also
To be made of letters and numbers,
Hence my presence here
On the sidewalk, a wriggling ontology
With a new shade of lip gloss.
Just as I discover my sultry collection of atoms
A brief spectrum of colors
Approaches my periphery. The magnetic field
Of passers-by disrupts the afternoon,
Which moves through my brain like water.
In the air around us, soft beginnings
Hatch like feathered eggs,
Units of sense or experience: a wet leaf
Pressed onto the cheek,
A ream of spiderwebs dangling from the sky.
We collect them in a frenzied haze,
Every cosmic blossom
Of light and sound unfolding in our ears.

TERROIR

A climate-controlled temple burns
At one end of the universe.
Another universe floats by undetected.

You wade through the shallows, lonely for truth.
Silver fish throw themselves against the escarpment,
Their broken bodies returning to the encroaching black.

A crowd walks right into the omen.
It masturbates shells.

In its pale pilled nightshirt, the Etcetera presses a button
To rewind time back to the very beginning.
It fell asleep and missed its favorite part.

A blue orgasm spatters across the screen.
A small child wakes up in the dark.

Do we hold our consciousnesses like balloons,
Tethered to our wrists?
What else is kept prisoner?

THE SHORE

Wonder what happens when you throw a glass bottle
Filled with the pupae of angels
Over the side of a red cliff?

Ever been downstream from the Everything
As it solemnly micturates
The meaning of life into the water?

Hash-gray rocks turn over boredly.
The fronds stay where they are.

My opal-colored fear builds
A house on the shore while Everything's
Mother slowly shreds infinite potatoes by the sink.

Ever feel like you're asleep under the seat of an arbiter
Who keeps shifting side to side as the courtroom fills
With the green, discarded heads of sea slugs?

One day, leaving the house becomes a territory
That is no longer yours.

On a nearby shipwreck,
The abalone sweeps out its apertures,
Installs recessed lighting.

An android rushes by
Wielding a shopping list, idly calculating
The distance to the edgemost star.

Ready to take the turn into non-remembering?
Alive with the discordant remnants of tongues?

OO

I am getting older; just watch me
As I drive my little car off the road into a bramble;
The bramble is distinguished; it is not
Its fault I am bleeding into its arms; to save time
I turn inside out; I mistake my genitals for a man's;
I parade around with a tarp collecting spacecraft;
I try to have sex with a flower
And get interrupted; a hawk comes to rescue me;
It buries me among its eggs; I try to remain
Very small; the ghosts are in the parlor playing cards;
This makes me nervous; my skin shaped like a basketball;
Spiders walk all over my circumference;
I am a witch-man, an oo-man; hawks and spiders
Protect me from man-man; I wake up in a sunflower;
The leaves smell like Time; my consciousness
Forms a sphere the size of a shrub
Around my head; its brambles grab onto the air;
It messes up some electrons; one of them yells "FUCK!"
And I have to start my story over;
I am getting older; just watch me

VOICES IN UNDERTONE

By now, even the clouds are mutating.
They go berserk
Even at night.

In front of the moon,
Behind the moon
There are clouds.

It was an accident.
It was just one possibility
Of infinite outcomes.

Some day I will float
5 inches above my body
Just like a cloud.

Clouds are the spirits of oceans
Ripe with information
About the past.

They take off their slippers
Before they enter the house.
They lift the train of a long dream.

PHYLOGENY

I am going to ask you a few questions.
I do not want you to become upset.
I know it is a sensitive topic for you, questions.
You remember a time when someone asked you
A question about Belonging
And then immediately transmogrified into a pyramid
Of snails. This kind of trauma lingers.
Rather than asking you a question, I am going to
Describe for you a sentence. The sentence
Has a beginning, middle, end.
The basic biology and theology of a centipede.
When I feed the sentence at night
Through my long, exclamation mark nipples
It speaks one of seventy languages.
At the end of its life, the sentence walks sideways
Into a plague and is forever stript
From the annals, and instead hangs
Like a Chihuly chandelier
Over the living room of our entire lives.

HOLE

There is a hole in the glow.
The people gather around it, looking afraid.
Is it warm in there?
Do they practice psychiatry?
Soon, measures are taken.
They rope off the glow.
The people are too close to the hole.
Motives are questioned.
An allegory is written about the hole
So parents don't have to mention it directly
When warning their children about the hole.
Someone starts throwing pennies in it
For luck, and then suddenly
The people are throwing all kinds of things
Into the hole: sweaters, candelabras,
Vast sums of money.
Nothing ever comes back from the hole.
The people lose their superstitions.
They forget about the hole,
Which they once feared and revered.
Soon they start throwing trash
Into the hole, champagne bottles,
Dead bodies. A century or two pass
And the hole starts to fill up.
The people start noticing the hole
Again. Where did it come from?
Does it have a podcast?
An avalanche of refuse and corpses
Pours into the glow.
Who could have done this!
What happens to my nice slippers!

NEWS

At first, I am asleep. Then dreams crawl in
Like white spiders on tall legs.

I enter a field of elk.
We all agree that we have bodies.

A brown, hieroglyphed stone
Is of some importance.

I have never seen my dead father here.
It has become clear that I am an elk,

Albeit of human form,
Brightly-colored.

In the center of our collective awareness,
There is a hedgehog on its back

Squirming ineffectually. We watch.
It is today's news.

THE ZOO

Do not threaten me with bears.
I can barely detect my own eyeball.

I keep my head fastened securely
To my throat so the sun does not kill me
With its beams, hurling themselves through
Space like angry swans.

Do not make this about you.
There were no "first bears." They were all
Birthed from the abstraction of a single zoo.

Don't say with a look of hopefulness:
"There are still bears that walk the earth."
There were never any bears, and don't even begin to think
There was ever a zoo.

JULIE HOWD

Julie Howd is the author of *Threshold* (2020), winner of the Host Publications Chapbook Prize, and *Talking from the Knees Up* (dancing girl press, 2018). Her work can be found in the *I Scream Social Anthology*, *Deluge*, *The Spectacle*, *Sixth Finch*, and elsewhere. She lives in Amherst, MA.