

Memory Tell Memory

Rachel Jamison Webster

V.

Shudder of gulls in my chest,
 blooddarkness, serum and cell dancing, tackling
one another, changing places, and again:

A motheaten ballgown swings from the water pipe.

Swings, swung? I thought it hung still, filling with dust.

*A child runs barefoot in a pink leotard, an auburn wig
 and sunglasses. He kneels in the grass, wheezing,
then flicks an iridescent beetle to the sky.*

Shame is wearing a brown dress
 and a helmet.

IV.

The only thing I'm good at, he says,
 is looking good. *He dresses*

*like me every afternoon for eight
years. I name him Michelle*

Our parents do not
 disapprove.

*Slicing through
the water on your back, flutter kick,
butterfly, flutter kick,*

*butterfly, flutter butter,
fly fly fly*

We unzipped
the lane, swam blind
without breath, blood
beating in our eyes.

*Trying to pass the boys ahead, spread
fingers grazing shy in steps, years*

*later, my lover's thin thighs
in the bath, water turning
lukewarm, stale so fast.*

III.

*He's wearing his cape to the grocery store,
putting on go-go boots and a baseball cap* In autumn,

I practice forgiving myself,
try grace and forgetting,
the quiet crafts of camouflage:

*Rounding the field
on the back of
a gorgeous orange*

Corvette, smiling and

*waving the same wave,
smiling and waving the
same, I waved the same* what

did I remember then?

*The tribe arrived slowly, after many days.
From the hill, the mass of people looked like*

*a living blanket pulled up, over the burnt earth.
They carried their children on their backs, and
not even their deaths then were met alone*

II.

It began, it begins
in the very weave and the weft of the
flesh, *but why unravel*
redorange, lit with the dripbeat
this stitch of fear *again?*

pulseflutter, pulseflutter
slackbanner flapping,
waving slowmotion,
submerged—

openmouthed

sound

When morning came, it carried names
in a feathered voice. Call it

sight, birth of memory, name the color
orange, but remember *light*
entered the room
in measured lines

and you

were one of many, shined,
swaddled, placed in a rows like
instruments.

I wish I could recall that: wanting
nothing but to be chosen, and held.

I.

Memory—healer, magician—you are still invention's
whore, pulling tricks from your pocket like scarves,
arranging yourself in the rumpled dress,
the lamé disco shirt, calico petticoats over silk
pantaloons, hoop earrings and tigerseye
beads, the cardigan sweater, the fringed vest, the satin shawl,
the ermine collar, the striped bikini and the smoking robe,
truly

don't you think we knew
one another before? Weren't you up in the tower with me, afraid

to hold the bowl carved from bone?
Weren't you afraid, and wasn't my going

before you something like mercy, or love?

O.

*A blue box of razor blades
under the bathroom sink, slowmotion dances*

*in group homes, the sour smell of age,
canned corn, your nervous hands*

*sweeping up, open, asking,
asking, Jesus* I brought back everything

I found for you,

then stopped when I feared

the name they would give me. *You turn away
your bruised cheek, and bind*

your wrist in yellow His mouth now
is choked with tulle, his wings
are bent back and pinned.

You stand on the roof of the barn and fall
into a pile of old coats

Memory, dear twin, dear soul
will you remain

when we are gone, immutable

as a scarab, common as a moth?

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