The Body Wars

I walked into the woods bleeding, I
left the town and mourned.
Midnight in Alaska, still light and I
was alone, walking into the Sitka woods,
it had been 1 year since I’d bled, and
longer since I’d fucked anyone, I
was propelled forward, into the thickness,
into the needles and dirt of Sitka spruce
and stupidly not even afraid of bear.
My father, the person I clung to, needed
to stay alive, had died six months before.
He was the only one who made sense in my body,
and his leaving was the impossible thing.
I didn’t yet know my own wars and how to name them.
So during my father’s sickness,
when I stopped bleeding, the gynecologist said,
well, it’s stress, and did I
know that in World War II, the women
paratroopers stopped having periods?
I was stunned by his directness, intensity, earnestness.
You are in a war, he said.
I didn’t know what to do with that.
And so I got on a boat to Alaska, the
Alaska Marine Highway, slept on the deck
until I froze, then the shipmen gave me
a hanging bunk and slipped me
food from the cafeteria. They said, You can
sleep here, but watch out for the bow-thrusters.
I had no idea what they meant, until the sound
burst open and my berth swayed—and
it was time to get off. It was a time of great
changes, and days later I’m wandering
the woods at midnight, feeling lost and found
in this Northern place, and it was there
I felt the blood start to move, felt a rising and
falling and the stream down my leg—and I cried in
the forest alone, for my beautiful father, gone
too soon, for myself and all my ignorance:
not even knowing my own wars—
the ones already fought,
or the many to still come.
Stormday

It never occurred to me until this stormday, while swinging in the wind, that trees are travelers, in the ordinary sense.

John Muir

I’m in the desert reading about the Sierra Nevada forests, thinking of storms. My astrologer said it wasn’t my job—but the three colliding transits making me crazy.

All these daily lightning strikes are wearing me down, and when I read John Muir I ask, Am I waving or bending? He talks about the madroños with “red bark and large glass leaves” —and I become smaller and made full at the same time.

What would it be like to be stormless?

It wouldn’t be life, and the “sea waves on a shelving shore” would sink into flatness. Truly, it’s the floating, dropping in so deep that I love.

Like when Muir enters the song, the trees singing, and talks about the “annihilation of years.” What could be better?

He says: “. . . I suddenly recognized a sea-breeze, as it came sifting through the palmettos and blooming vine-tangles, which at once awakened and set free a thousand dormant associations . . .”

Where were they—those thousand?

The air full/the instant of opening/ the leap immediate——
Those thousand, romantic moments of a life/
and he said that now he was a boy/that now/
“. . . all the intervening years had been annihilated . . .”

Beautiful minute, oh minute of gone years.
Crushing It

Halloween, the pizza delivery girl said:

*Are you dressed like a trucker?*

_No_, I said, _I’m supposed to be a Western woman writer._

_Oh_, she said, _I like it._

Someone else thought I was Eddie Vedder, someone else, Tommy Morello from Rage Against the Machine.

Maybe it was the ballcap flannel vibe, but I was shooting for Pam Houston, dreaming of Wyoming and the Big Horns.

Like when the cab driver in Dublin said, _You look exactly like Anastacia, she’s a singer, she’s beautiful—except she has long blonde hair._

Then I crossed the road and the guy at airport security said, _This way, sir._

Once at the make-up counter in Macy’s, I asked for some skin cream.

The skin specialist stood a foot from my face and said, _I’m sorry, sir, we don’t carry that line._

Pam Houston, where are you now?

I know you like cowboys but the Big Horns call me daily—it’s wide open that I need, where the big road snakes and cattle move so slowly, they won’t even call me ma’am, sir, or Neil Young.

I’m here, in Pittsburgh, crushing on you.
Gunlover

But what you’ve done here
Is put yourself between a bullet and a target
And it won’t be long before
You’re pulling yourself away

Citizen Cope

I love the long barrel, the extension.
The shape, the round, and the sharp of it,
spinning chamber and clicking sounds—
the shine when it’s polished,
and the beautiful dense heavy in my hand.
Like it’s something that means something—
and I know that’s not something to say,
because I don’t want anyone to die,
because trajectory, because 1 in the chamber,
7 in the clip, because tracer bullet, trace it back to
I can’t own a gun, curved handle—

It’s like the slamming down a vertical street, all
the while, the language I thought I had for it
narrowing and falling, and the blue/green flowers
on the cover of my Buddhist book
break fluid like a guitar solo,
and I love the slide of it,
the slamming repetition until the break———
cracks fluid,
until the pop——
the wilding———
there’s a cannonball inside me waiting to
sling—first shot and all the shots

and the hills split,
I’m so tired with the walking in to them.
Don’t lose my stride into that other
world,
and there’s a truck with high tin sides in my mind,
and everything now is flesh-colored, and walking
away, and walking away, so
no, I can’t own a gun—
so no, loading it up and feeling that metal,
I would use it, I
would split open one day/
I would shoot it—

and the silver barrel, the round and sharp aren’t
the thing—it’s the hammer down,
and I’m the bullet—and I’m the target,
shell of a person, sleeping charlatan—
and that break inside me,
explosion of the con artist inside me—
sometimes I want to make a deal with beauty
no matter what.
Drunken Trees

Because permafrost melts, it causes
a lot of erosion. A lot of trees can’t stand up
straight. If the erosion gets worse,
everything goes with it.
Sarah James, Native American Elder

The trees are drinking again, bending and ready
to fall.
It’s not just the trees.
Nothing can grow straight—the ground is
shifting—the spinning of it rocks me,
the off-kilter/
what is moving and what is steady?
Five planets retrograde and dirt doesn’t
seem like dirt anymore—
If the rivers change course, does it mean
that my heart can change direction?
Will our feelings rush and flood into
the bodies of others?
The bending, leaning humans are littering
the sidewalks of every city, and
I’m afraid of what happens next:
will our hearts break open and
forget to be hearts?
Will our sturdy legs buckle into chairs
that others sit on? Will we wish
for everything horizontal until
the earth is finally flat into the sea?
Jesus still shows up in cheap tin mirrors
all over New Mexico Taos, and he’s
not moving yet—the virgin mary might
finally speak up and say that virginity crap
was an inside job—she was paid off,
and really Frida Kahlo was the son of god—
her love of the body and masturbation
kept things moving, shifting—and the
only thing paramount was pleasure—
oh trees please stand up
We are sorry—dear trees that speak for
the wobbly lives we lead—bending,
leaning into the expanse, the vast
circumference of now,
the circle of the circle of the
globe—
we love you,
orb of our sphere,
continental shelf of our move and shift—
as we crack into the mad ocean.