

## 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.