

OUTER BANKS

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Heat squeezes the last desire dry
 hangs it like an old tee shirt on fencing
 framing my back yard: *Ocrakoke* dyed
 red pales now to pink, the lighthouse fades
 over the breast pocket. The collar sags
 yanked out of all proportion, dingy
 from sweaty days of yard work. Just a rag
 suggesting someplace we have been, a sponge
 for drips and spills, a wipe for stains and smears.
 It takes some cleaning up, these memories:
 we started where the ferry docked, at dawn.
 We had the long ride to ourselves, all clear,
 north to south, gears wide open, coasting
 through the morning the whole island down.

II

You and I rode the whole island down
 pursing our lips with the taste of the salt
 heavy in the air, burnished by the dawn-
 light stretching thin across the sea, fine sands
 catching in our still thick hair, fine grains
 nesting at the folds of our mouths, our eye
 lashes, our breasts ... The bicycles gained
 speed with the long lazy slope south and we
 focused more on the whirling turn of tires,
 the rush towards the tip only our caution
 restrained, caution a long shadowed fear
 cast sharp to the west, dragging like action
 pressed hard on the rims spinning wheel
 there on the easternmost edge of our world.

III

There on the easternmost edge of the world
as you and I knew it waters pressed close
the ocean a sculptor, shaping the shores
of the crusted land, a wild vision loose
in the depth of the sea, a behemoth
churning the inky depths up to the light
a rare crest of the surface, fleshy bright
sun blind brilliant slick hide like a mirror
flashing soul songs like a jubilant spray
scintillant above the false horizon.

False like all horizons. We careen
through the long sweep of wide curve, we hurry
along old streets our tires sibilant thrum
steady to the stone edge of the ocean.

IV

We stood at that very edge of ocean
and drew pure breath. So were we pure again,
blessed by the heat and salt and sand, made clean
for a mutual offering pagan
to the very heart.

East, south, west, north
we bowed; we mouthed elements and prayed
ceremony for each other, rebirth
a sacrifice of who we were once, laid
like flowers on the ebbing of the tide.
The sky was the blue of the virgin's veil
the sun a brilliant clasp of vibrant gold;
confident we conjured miracles

to lift us each above the common claim
of mundane matters rattling in time.

V

We minimized mundane matters of time,
rattled bones against the seduction
of comfort. We would remain bold, untamed
and open to all of life's wild passion,
initiate and priestess, both and each
sister mother lover daughter never
forgotten, never out of an arms reach.
For me, it was the first time I ever
thought I might be more than what I am:
a vision not of gods or queens but just
my whole self, too long pregnant with poems
not yet written, vital with the warm flush
of possibility, a lover
inspired by her reflection in another.

VI

Inspired by reflections we turned north
heading for the islands lone ferryman
taking on the long road of softened tar
and persistent slope, under a high sun
and no shade, anywhere.

We drafted each
for the other, wheels now turning with drive
from our legs, ankles, the balls of our feet;
we cooled our muscles in the oceans waves
and began again, and again, in fits

and starts moving uphill, northward, churning
against the persistent spread of dusk, its
threat of the last ferryboat 'til morning.
We rattled down the pier as the full moon
rose, gained the deck as the last blast blew.

VII

We reached the ferry with the last horn blast
and it carried us here, where we live now
reaching like scavengers into our past
for the breath of a blessing on our vow
to live always from the inky depths
we stirred to the surface each for each

What if we had missed that final ferry,
abandoned castaways in ocean air?

What if, oh love, what if we two had slept
Open and wild on that easternmost beach
of the worlds as we knew them, bare,
at the edge of existence, rising renewed,
seaweed curling entwined in our hair, laced
with brine, splashed by light, salty with desire?