

TONYA EBERHARD

Abduction, 1884

When she was six she was taken to the place of the pines.
The only thing left behind was a bowl of sliced
pineapples, four pale yellow triangles. The licked spoon
rested across the porcelain rim. She was given a room
with no windows, a cherry wood dresser pressed up
against yellowed wallpaper with roses. They were
gypsies dancing with scarlet scarves.

Loneliness graced the woman who took her. She
desperately wanted something to love, without
ever knowing how to. She gave her a dolly
named *girl*, who had tangled, maggot-infested
brown hair and a dirty white dress imprinted
with little strawberries.

She made her call her *mother*, and each night
placed an oval plate outside her door—dry,
crusted bread scraps, shriveled plums, flattened
grapes and hemorrhaging raspberries. Even if
she ate it all, the girl was still hungry. Her stomach
churned acid that burned her throat, her intestines
groaned and twisted, playing the role of a
contortionist.

There was no sun to lead the way into caverns
Of the deep. Candles were placed around
The perimeter of the bathtub. The girl's hair floated
around her like black kelp. She was a failed
Ophelia, trying to get her lungs to expire underwater
multiple times. Imagining water lilies and mermaids
always called her back.

By the time she was thirteen, she had given up
remembrance of her name. Every Saturday she was
called down for tea, fitted with a black dress too
tight at the bust, too long at the feet. *What a lovely*

daughter you have, they would say. Her trembling hand rattled the teacup in thanks.

On an early spring day, she lay on the wooden floor, one arm outstretched towards the oval plate, the other hand pressing a peach pit to her lips, her tongue sliding over the crevices.

She wondered what the rain looked like as it fell on the roof above her, a soft *pitter-patter*. She looked up to see flowers peeling off the wall, they were gypsies in red scarves, dancing around her.

“Beach”

On honeycomb sands the
beachcombers search for
starfish, pearls tucked under
tongues of clams, spiky
sea urchins in the deeper ends.

With no kelpies in the water,
sand mermaids are built on
the shore. Upper body flailing,
arms swinging in protest.

The illusion: human legs trapped
under wet sand. Long hair of
seaweed, a natural green
clinging to sunburnt forehead.

How do mermaids birth their
babies? Pushed from the
bellybutton. Eggs laid in
a fluid nest.

They die by dissolving into
sea foam, another life formed
from the substance.

Just like we, you, I, us.

Forming, separating, dissolving into
another counterpart. Gone then
regrown, the next generation taking
our place,

a starfish growing back its
arm before being thrown back to
the sea.

Born in the Wrong Era
for Anna Glenski

Whoever thought to mix
peas with macaroni & cheese
is a genius. It is the staple
stovetop meal after early
dismissal schooldays in tedious
Catholic uniform. Plaid skirts,
collared shirts that brag something
we don't believe. We eat the pasta
from half-dirtied bowls. It doesn't
matter, it tastes of home.

It is the era of flip phones and
dial-up internet, tight fitted tops,
flare jeans. Kids still have the
imagination for midnight
Bloody Mary dares in the
bathroom. Don't be stupid, don't
say it. TV show episodes air like
serialized Victorian Novels in the
newspapers.

It is the summer of endless rain.
During family dinner with another
family, my eyes gaze out the
window to see mudslides carrying
away the neighborhood woods,
flooded baseball fields, overflowing
rivers. Then, the jolting voice at the
dinner table: 'Pass the honey, honey-'
the nervous laugh, a blush.

Under rain-soaked sky, mosquitos
bite into our skin as our teeth sink
into fudge bars. During the car ride
to my other home, you blast the
song *Chariot*, insisting to play it

at your funeral.

I pinky-promise, not knowing until
years later it was under one condition—
only if we could go back and be buried
in the right era.