

## the Sea of Cortez

I live in the north  
My life is on the surface  
The ground is frozen  
I cannot be buried  
if I die in the winter

I wear protective coverings  
I still lose heat  
I guard my warmth  
I read much of the night  
I am dry around the edges

I dream of the sea  
but I am afraid  
I am afraid  
I belong in the desert  
where everything is underneath

I know how to horde my water

I have come to a resort  
People come here for the fishing  
I too am on an expedition  
but I've come here on my own  
from the north to the south  
along the edge of the continent  
to the tip and back around toward the north again

I avoid maps and I don't have a sense of place  
anywhere  
but this is the only place I've been  
where the desert meets the ocean  
and so it is the only place  
I can imagine  
I could feel at home  
if I knew what that would feel like

I have come here for a particular alignment  
to sit on the tiled veranda of this room  
to look south down the coast  
west to the desert  
and east to the Sea of Cortez

I trace the coastline with my fingertips  
I never was good at geography  
My desire is another cartography  
As the sun sets  
I watch the water turn to mercury  
The sea is my thermometer  
I could put my hand in it  
to measure what I lack

\* \* \*

*At night my feet are in the ocean  
my head is in the desert  
I lie on my back  
on the sand in the moonlight  
with the waves just reaching my feet  
A woman is tending me  
comforting, healing me  
I can't see her but I know her voice  
I know from her voice  
she has long silver hair  
she wears in a braid  
I know her touch  
I know her hands  
which are older than mine  
A woman  
is doing what I am unable  
to do in waking life:  
a woman is ministering to me*

\* \* \*

I have been here before  
I came with my husband  
We came for the sun

We came to be tended  
We lay by the pool  
on white canvas mats  
beneath square white canvas umbrellas  
Men in white pants and white shirts with bandannas  
served us our lunch  
They changed the covers on the mats  
They opened and closed the umbrellas  
They swept the walkways  
They raked the sand every day  
around the azalea bushes and the hibiscus trees

I browned my skin  
I wore a white gauze dress  
I analyzed and memorized  
the different blues of the pool the sea the sky  
I pretended I was desired

I didn't go into the water

We stayed in this same room  
K-1, kah uno  
Kah-uno, we said to the men in white  
when we ordered lunch  
when we ordered a drink  
Kah-uno they greeted us  
as they served us martinis and shrimp en brochette  
They knew us by our room number

We drank wine  
as we watched the stars  
from this same veranda  
We discussed mathematics and physics  
Cantor sets and irrational numbers  
how some infinities are larger than others  
and whether there is enough matter in the universe  
to stop its expansion  
He told me about the light missing from the universe  
He told me about dark matt

We played games of perfect information  
We gave each other absolution  
for what we had not done

We could not talk about ourselves  
We could not talk about our lives  
We could talk about mathematics  
We could talk about cosmology

I do not know the names of these stars  
but I know why the night sky is dark

I am not missing light  
or matter  
but moisture

\* \* \*

*The woman with the silver hair  
brushes the sand from my body  
She reads my desire in the dust  
in the wrinkles of the soles of my feet*

*What you want is not what you have  
she tells me*

*What you want is not what you don't have, she says*

*What you want is in the desert*

\* \* \*

After my divorce  
I came here with my lover  
Of course I had him bring me  
where I'd been before  
I always practice what I know  
I prepare for what I've done

I am well trained

I put on his desire  
with my white gauze dress  
I swallowed his gaze  
with my shrimp en brochette  
I tended and attended  
I pretended I desired

I cannot distinguish between training and desire

My lover was fragile  
although he was much larger than I  
We didn't talk much  
I censored most of what I could say  
I never relaxed in his presence  
because of course there was always something else  
I could do something more  
something sweeter something warmer  
something softer

I covered my fierceness  
the way I'd cover a chair  
I hid it padded it made it pretty  
the way I'd sheathe a knife  
as if I were making sheaths for knives  
out of felt and rick-rack and sequins

It was cloudy and I didn't get enough sun  
but I was always thirsty  
I couldn't feel my tongue in my mouth  
I got up early to walk alone in the desert  
and watch the sun rise over the Sea of Cortez

I wondered what it would be like to walk in the desert at night

\* \* \*

*In the evening the woman with the silver hair  
undresses me she prepares me  
She takes wet cloths of purple linen  
dips them in my memory wrings them out*

*lays them on my body  
on my cheeks on my stomach on my thighs  
where my regret is stored  
The smell is sharp  
It stings my eyes  
The cloths harden and turn white with salt  
She rinses them out in the sea*

\* \* \*

In the morning I walk the beach  
I see pieces of coral that have been in the ocean  
They are weathered and covered with sand  
I pick one up  
It is styrofoam  
These are pearls that were his eyes  
This is coral that was styrofoam  
I have mistaken styrofoam for coral  
I am frightened by my mistake

I am frightened I will not be able  
to make the distinctions I need to make  
I am frightened I will no longer know  
the difference between styrofoam and coral  
between training and desire

I lie by the pool  
A couple come to photograph the view  
The woman is petite  
Her hair is streaked blonde  
Her t-shirt says "The Lazy Girls' Club"  
Her bikini is fluorescent pink  
She has a slight frown  
She looks out at the horizon  
She is waiting for something  
It is not the dark-haired man beside her  
She holds his wallet  
He holds the camcorder  
He takes pictures of the horizon  
He doesn't take pictures of her

She puts on a pair of jeans  
They are expensively labeled  
deliberately patched and torn  
I want to ask her:  
Who told you who taught you  
to want these clothes to like these clothes?  
Who taught you to want this?  
To want what you have? What do you want?

I see myself beside her  
costumed differently  
in a taupe gabardine skirt and a taupe silk blouse  
in high heeled but proper pumps of taupe leather  
wearing a watch of stainless steel and gold  
tested and sealed against depths  
I have no time or inclination to explore  
I am holding my husband's ego instead of his wallet  
I am holding my lover's cock

Who taught you to want what you want?  
I would ask her  
Who taught me to want  
what I want  
Who taught me to bury  
what I want

I see myself turning away  
walking into the desert  
in my high heeled taupe shoes

When I married I wore taupe to the wedding  
I wore taupe often  
taupe pumps a taupe handbag a taupe blouse and skirt  
stockings in every shade of taupe  
I had a drawer full of stockings  
every shade of beige ivory gray brown  
a drawer full of skin

If I walked in the desert at night I would  
go barefoot I am not afraid  
of the desert I am not afraid of  
stones I am not afraid of cactus  
I am not afraid of snakes  
I am afraid of how I lost contact  
with the earth  
I am afraid of those  
high heeled taupe pumps  
I am afraid of my insensibility  
I am afraid of that colorless clothing  
protection from my predators

I am afraid of my own protection

\* \* \*

*The woman with the silver hair  
is sweeping sand toward the sea  
smoothing the edges of the desert  
tending it  
She stops her sweeping  
She leads me to a wall of rock  
I press my body against the rock  
I am so dry  
the rock feels moist  
The rock is absorbent  
My body draws water from the rock  
My body leaves an imprint  
my breasts my hands my mouth  
I taste the rock the rock breathes  
Where my mouth is  
the stone is red*

*Your tongue is the key, she says*

\* \* \*

I don't know why I've come here again  
I didn't come to drink tequila and dance on tables  
I don't drink anymore and my sense of balance is impaired



No one cares if I lift my skirt  
I am too serious for any male  
I have lost the art of conversation  
I haven't come here to find it  
I have lost my appetite for distraction  
I am not a good companion  
My attraction is diminishing  
No one would pay to keep me around

I was here as a companion  
What I want is communion  
Can I still tell the difference  
between companionship and communion?  
between styrofoam and coral?  
between mercury and water?  
between training and desire?

I want  
I am afraid to say  
I want  
I am afraid to say  
what I want  
I am afraid to say  
What I want  
I am afraid to say  
What I want is  
I am afraid to say  
What I want is not  
what I have

What I want is stripped off  
dried out buried in the sand  
like skin in the desert

\* \* \*

*The woman with the silver hair  
lays me down on the beach  
She aligns me west to east  
feet toward the water*

*head toward the desert  
She digs a channel in the sand  
so the water collects around me  
from the sea  
She is the conduit  
When she speaks  
water comes from her mouth*

*Eadem mutata resurgo, she says:  
though changed I shall arise the same*

*\* \* \**

I sit on my veranda  
I watch the sun set in the desert  
The desert is insistent  
unapologetic  
It does not soften  
It does not make amends  
the way I do

I hear the voices  
of my husband  
of my lover  
They say I am not suitable  
They say I do not satisfy  
I put their voices in the room next door  
Kah-dos, they are known as  
They are kah-dos and  
I am kah uno  
I can still hear them  
explaining, insisting  
I put their voices in a burlap sack  
I fill the sack with sand

I drag the sack to the edge of the desert  
The desert is dark  
I bury the sack  
I return to the sea  
I sit on my veranda

I do not wait for anyone  
to pour me a drink  
to take me to dinner  
to stroke me or to stop

There is no moon  
There are no stars  
There are no voices

\* \* \*

In the morning I walk up the hill  
on the cement walkway  
freshly swept  
through the sand  
freshly raked  
to the dining room  
where I am served fresh fruit  
by the men in white

I do not speak except to say  
kah-uno  
They do not notice I have changed

\* \* \*

*At night I lie on the beach at the edge of the water  
The woman with the silver hair draws a line  
with her fingertips  
from my head toward the desert  
a small channel in the sand  
When I rise I see the imprint  
of my body in the sand  
I watch the water from the ocean slowly move  
into my body through the channel to the desert  
I watch the contours of my body fill with water  
soften disappear*

\* \* \*

In the morning I lie by the pool  
I am not thirsty

but I crave meat  
I used to eat more flesh  
I again have that craving  
for salt and something tough  
to cut and to chew

I wait for evening  
I follow a trail into the desert  
a parcourse  
I am not interested in fitness  
I carry my knives into the desert  
I have a collection  
knives to fillet  
to skin to slice  
to chop  
I have sewn elaborate sheaths for these knives  
I take off the sheaths

I follow steps of sand  
into the arroyos  
There are cables running through the brush  
to light the trail at night  
I cut the cables  
The desert is dark  
I leave the trail  
I bury the knives

I rake the sand after I bury the knives  
I rake the sand in the dark with my fingers  
I rake the desert  
I tend it

I walk in the desert alone  
My feet are bare  
I feel dry leaves dry brush dry sand  
I feel the holes  
where small things burrow and grow larger  
I carry my watch  
my last possession my last expectation

I bury my watch in the sand  
I smooth the sand into a mound  
I smooth the sand  
I tend it  
I find my way back with my feet  
I feel my tears in the sand  
with the soles of my feet

\* \* \*

*The woman with the silver hair  
soothes me, she tends me  
She fills in the voids  
in my body with her body  
She dresses me in gauze clothing  
a gauze shirt and gauze pants  
of yellow ochre, the color of my desire  
She paints my face in upward strokes of yellow  
with her palms*

\* \* \*

During the day I stay in my room  
I no longer read  
The shutters are closed  
I sleep through the day  
I am bound in my dreams  
like bandages  
dreams of attraction and admiration  
dreams of passion and recognition  
dreams of permission possession and praise

I unwrap them as I sleep

When I awake  
I hear a crack  
The sheets are covered  
with dry husks, pieces  
of a shell I have shed  
I see beside my pillow  
fragments of a woman's face

wide eyes high forehead round cheeks fixed smile  
fragments of a face I recognize  
wearing an expression I used to conform to  
I gather up the pieces  
I wrap them in my dreams  
I walk into the desert  
I bury the fragments of my shell  
I bury the lies my body told

I follow my longing  
It is a dry creek bed  
whose stones I lay as I go  
I set down a stone  
for every drink for every man  
for every regret I ever had

As I walk on the stones  
I hear voices  
low murmurs and entreaties  
soft protests and pleadings  
the voices I've buried  
the voices I've forgotten

I follow my longing  
into the desert  
away from the sea  
through the arroyos  
channels in the desert  
I walk these channels

The night sky is absorbent  
filled with dark matter  
saturated with the memory of when everything was one  
Gravity is the memory of light  
The desert is the memory of water  
The channels are the desert's memory  
of the water that was there  
My body has channels  
the memory of my desire

the memory of when  
I was wet  
the memory of when  
I had my skin

I follow channels I cannot see  
deeper into the desert  
When I lose my way  
I put my fingers in the sand  
and feel for moisture

When I can see nothing  
When I can feel nothing  
I listen  
I hear the sound of water  
dripping in the desert  
The sand is dry  
There is no spring There is no pool  
I follow the sound I find the source  
a red snake  
water dripping from its mouth  
I take the red snake for my tongue  
It drips a stream of words unsaid  
into the desert  
I feel them damp beneath the sand  
with my fingertips  
a stream of protest and objection  
of insistence and desire

I follow the stream of my lost words  
to a wall of rocks  
On the rocks are petroglyphs  
imprints of women  
I see my own  
beside a narrow fissure  
I turn sideways to enter  
I hear a soft dry rhythmic rustle  
as if the brittle parchment pages of a book  
were being read at last

Inside the rocks I feel the edge  
of something dry and hard  
underneath my feet  
buried in the sand  
I have found the edge of a woman  
I have found my skin  
stripped off dried out and weighted down  
with sand with time with implication  
I kneel and trace familiar contours in the sand  
as I try to lift my skin  
I cannot pull it out  
I must dig my skin  
out of the desert

\* \* \*

At night I walk into the desert  
to dig my skin out with my hands  
I dig up skin  
I bury knives  
I bury time and history

I take off my gauze clothing  
I bury it  
I gather up my skin  
It cracks and rustles as I fold it in my arms  
I carry my skin to the ocean  
I unfold it and unfold it and unfold it  
I read the dust within its folds  
with my fingertips  
I read the past  
arrogance and innocence  
expectation propitiation  
analysis and desiccation  
I brush the past away

I immerse my skin in the Sea of Cortez  
It softens and expands  
I put on my skin



Water pours from my womb  
I put my fingers in the stream  
I read the future  
connection and communion  
revelation and reunion  
discernment

\* \* \*

*I am the woman with the silver hair  
I came from the north  
I live in the south  
I go west into the desert  
I return east to the sea  
I sweep the sand toward the sea  
I smooth the edges of the desert  
I tend it  
I rake the sand I sift through time  
I sort memory from chronology  
I sweep the dust of history  
into the cracks of the desert  
I squat and fill the cracks with water  
from my womb  
I wash history away*