

in the current  
where drowning

is beautiful

ABIGAIL CHABITNOY



IN THE CURRENT WHERE DROWNING IS BEAUTIFUL

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IN THE CURRENT WHERE DROWNING IS BEAUTIFUL





I am looking for a way to sound  
the women catch / in my throat  
water  
lung

How do you say the women are at the beach?,  
wave after wave  
standing on shore  
still?,  
the water now to our throats looking  
for a wavesend where otherwise  
a field fallows—

Listen, they cut my fingers fin, fine, finé my neck gilled slit so I too could  
breathe and became aware another tongue carried  
in my throat

There was earth at the bottom so I dug  
There was a sea and a knife and a sacrifice  
and looking back  
I drank, salt and all  
the words I am learning

WAVE. moving swell on the surface. a disturbance that carries energy. *swell*.

see also, wave function. waves in phase, with like signs, will interfere constructively, leading to the possibility of bonding. those out of phase, with unlike signs, will interfere destructively.

*we were unable to head for shore  
since we would be rolled over by the **swell**—*

## SIGNS YOU ARE STANDING AT THE END

Two-thirds of the country is in drought. The waters have all gone walking.

*Nunakuarluni.*<sup>1</sup>

When white peaks crested the rolling hills behind our house

I knew it was time.

We understand since we are children waves break waves travel waves do the wave.  
Did the wave make it across the room? Did the people who started it move across  
the room?

Cause of death: traumatized. Cause of death: bad heart. Cause of death: exposure.<sup>2</sup>

(I heard it was an accident. In the end. In the breakers. There was no boat when I  
heard it.)

I took my sister and some others out the back door. The calm was not and  
the neatly kept lawn was not.

The sleeper wave was not.

Too many teeth I saw too late. The wave would not be dove under.

It turned snow, wet and heaving and we  
were already running.

---

<sup>1</sup> Take

<sup>2</sup> to the cold air; to want of sea ice; to warming air; to a landscape without trees; too many ribs;  
to the sea; to ghosts; to loss

of stable earth to plant one's feet, one's seed, one's egg, one's teeth.



After, a field. I could hear every dead thing.

*How do we behave in the field?*

They asked for a story, the ones we'd have to leave behind. Swallowed  
by the hoary mouth.

Never ignore what someone tells you in a dream, once the women said.

You are trying to remember what someone said

who is dead.

*Quliyangua'uciikamken.*<sup>3</sup> —

*Laam'paaq kuarsgu.*<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> I will tell you a story

<sup>4</sup> hard to leave in good light

## IN THE FIELD

They asked me if I was a citizen.

They wanted to know what I had seen/  
I had heard/  
this was only a test:

Look at the mark and tell them what you see.



*Akarngasqangcugmek pilirluku,*<sup>1</sup>  
a woman said to me.

They want more,  
she said.

I gave her a tooth from my mouth  
to cut the skin stretched before her.

She dug. With her mouth  
she dug enough holes  
in the earth she divided  
with her work.

She cut the skin even  
into pieces she divided  
in the earth:

this is for your mouth  
this is for your stomach  
this is for your hand  
this is for your rib  
this is for your table  
this is for sharing  
this is for later  
this is for the others  
this

is (for) you

For each she wound a thread  
around my neck.



I see a well,  
I said.

I showed them my hands  
clean under the nails and  
open  
    swallowed the dirt  
under my tongue.

They let me walk away

with the needle  
in my eye.

They don't look you  
in the eyes, these men  
    these days.

I walked away with a garden  
in my throat and seeds  
on my tongue.

---

<sup>1</sup> Make a way, make your way. dot by dot, string around your waist

A PERSISTENT DREAM OF LARGE BODIES

*for Joan, and those she is called after*

Naviyuk how to tell you  
last night we were on this ship together  
and you were there to comfort me?

But this morning I am afraid for you  
black steeling over the waters.

My lips are never not split  
splitting—

Tell me, are the wolves living  
along this shoreline any gentler  
than the Moscow water dog?

Even the promyshlenniki let them go  
extinct.

Have we ever not been readying for war  
in your lifetime?

Already my family is calling me—

the ones I don't know  
how to name,



In the stories I learned as a girl  
you are otherwise called  
after one who knows things.

You are called after one who knows  
how to listen.

She was given fire and earth.



This ground we are on has a history  
of flooding:

does it follow we are drowning?

Cut the breast out of a woman and she becomes a bird.  
Or was it her guts?

She can fly, I mean. It's that simple. So the stories go.

Girls go into the woods and return mothers  
so we invent little men, irresistible magic.

Have we ever not been readying for war?

At any moment the ship could sink: mothers go into the water  
become forces to be reckoned—

It can all fail tragically.

The waters take  
and give us back our dead.

We will have this ship  
the water, contents we have found.

## ANATOMY OF A WAVE

It had everything and nothing to do  
with mettle  
    fire before flint before,

*How many bodies will a lead ball move  
    through?*

*How many can one stand in a row?*

When the tide went out, they had nowhere to run  
    but that was many years ago, and if they have not died they live  
happily still.

    But you and I know that's not how the story goes.

I wake more ghosts each morning:  
    when I was born my mother and father  
    planted a tree west of the garden.

    We ripped it out when I left home—  
    its roots never took,  
    its limbs harbored mold in the sticky east wind.

We used to think a weak spine  
was inherited  
    but consider the shark  
    how some will stop swimming  
    in their sleep.

How does the forecast change?

We make weather with our teeth.  
Why should I be afraid of the sea?  
Let the toothed skin lie  
    if it asks too many bones.

Wait for the waves  
to start skipping,

Tie down the drifters and stretch the stomach before the fall.

*Don't turn your back on the water.*

What else grows on an island  
without trees?

*The need to make  
makes body—*

Others have seen water act this way before,  
it was many years ago,  
how many bodies a single wave can carry,  
how many relatives, casually.

They tied their boats to the tops of trees  
so the water wouldn't lose them,  
so the story goes.

Some say it was a boat that killed them. Bad heart, *traumatized*. Accidentally.  
I'm telling you what happens. She missed the boat.

Imagine what it might be like  
when the waters come  
to be a fish  
to be twelve strong, to be six, two hundred, or forty  
sharks swimming toward you—

## ALL THE DAUGHTERS

Liminally fault or cause,  
each morning and most afternoons  
brush against the moon,  
knock from its axis, remember,

*I keep living because someone else does not.*

Do the fish in the desert share the shore's vertigo?

What does water know of the want  
of our hands?

*You think it's just shallow, but*

if a man or a woman is sucked into the mudflats where  
before they were treading leisurely  
(the water or the dirt)  
if too cold to say it was leisurely (the man, the woman, or the water)  
but rather it wasn't certain they were drowning

is it my fault they are there?

*Sea change, a grey, another father, another daughter swept  
in the current. (see Fault/line (disambiguation); see fracture or crevice/  
crevasse)*

The water is trending higher these days with or without  
my paper moon and the wings in my corner are just  
for holding detritus.

The cat's cradle hanging from the ceiling is a hazard, sure,  
but only if you come at it from the wrong angle, the work  
or the moon.

Rivers string through maps through days  
through lips slipped grit

*(we keep living—),*

And if each of these beings has agency (such as the dirt)  
you can hardly blame yourself if the tide goes out and they're left  
sticks in the mud

—unless of course you have a boat and saw  
them struggling when there was still water enough  
to swim.

How will you spin it?

In August, girls sing songs and weave string figures  
to tangle the legs of the sun and slow its departure  
for winter. I would let go the sun for a fish or a bird  
to carry all the daughters across, and yes, the fathers  
and the mothers and the sons,

how far have you had to run?

The question to ask in such times is not why they jumped  
when the water was cold, what drew two bodies apart  
in the first place,  
the nature of the agency, the use  
of flapping.

Shorelines can be-witch like that: we all want to be seen  
to shine.

IN THE CURRENT WHERE DROWNING IS BEAUTIFUL

White breaks first, waves  
green, then black  
shining seas ships sailing  
not sailing:  
what is still  
wanting wind.

Used to be no man could go against,  
this weather too will pass. The wind  
not a river.

And if a puddle at the last  
gives way  
to desert:

corked bottle  
walled city  
veiled woman,

buried one, were you afraid?

*Carwaq tukniug.*<sup>1</sup>

If air the conscious element—  
sometimes breath  
sometimes bird—

the last few days have been windy, but

The current is strong, Nikifor,  
and it rains all the time.

*Tamiinek taangaq aturtapet,*<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> There is a river of woe, and a river to forget, and then there is the river  
that does not break by all the gods.

<sup>2</sup> Good to the last drop.

and sometimes  
if I were not afraid,  
a fish  
with teeth  
after all.

## SUPPLEMENTAL ENRICHMENT CURRICULUM

As children,  
we learned the names  
for all the pieces of  
a boat named *Mimi* and how  
to safely dispel salt from the sea  
water in a pinch  
assuming the presence  
of a black plastic bag,  
    enough vessels  
to be filled.

We learned how to warm a man  
who had slipped in the water  
how to make him tick  
again—how to regulate the heart  
again—how to make it race  
again.

    We learned it was  
a vulnerable thing—the man,  
muscle, the heart.

By summer we forgot  
in absence of a vessel to name  
the scarcity of shores  
to claim

    hemmed in  
by our green lawns and sated  
by the bottled water  
in our second fridges.

We didn't learn to identify  
how long a body had come  
by the rivers where we drew  
    the line.

We didn't learn to wash our wounds  
to keep flesh eaters at bay.

 *Man-eating monsters exist  
through every body of water  
in the imagination at least*

We didn't learn the many ways  
water knew we would have  
to thirst

the many ways our bodies  
would be found and filled  
wanting.

We didn't learn where to find a branch  
unblooded that would hold us  
when there were no more boats  
when the waters began to rise  
and the rivers took back their own.

IF NOT SEED

Let this           , body  
                          bear stones  
on the other side           of  
the flood—

Body,  
forever / still  
trying  
to decide  
(/how) to lay down  
these arms

When their weight  
                  demands  
                  to be upheld

When their comfort-  
                  plus depends on  
                  my complexion  
or

                  not least my  
come(-when-called-)liness  
my propensity for lines  
                  in which to stand  
my complicit course  
                  of inaction

Someday-daughter,  
                  how you sit or  
                  don't sit  
can make waves

Ears turn to war on the shore  
line  
bank unyielding  
distilled before the break—

I am contemplating words that take the shape  
of O

moon  
crater  
face  
sole-made boat  
body in water

descending

tooth  
hem  
mother  
open hand  
closed fist

site of (dis)articulation

Every kind (of) red mouth