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## INTERREGNUM

I was born wizened. Rasp of first breath,  
I took the tinders of my parents' gazes and flinted  
a honeyed flame. Before knowledge of cake or wood,  
before even I was plated with a name, there were  
cracklings and pleasings, wetly offered smiles and gasps:  
I was old.

I took my place, and a heat  
leapt up. Not mine,  
but I tended it.

Drinklings, we are born to this necessity. To help. Helpless,  
we snort the atmosphere, lunge toward milk, love. Eyes clouded,  
lungs dewy with night, we emerge from the close cabin rocking  
to a day already underway. Once I was emperor  
of a body not my own, yet I craved the broken levee.  
Haven, if it is haven, gives.

The swimmer passes  
her piped body toward  
the sting of light.

Ever after, the teat ducts remember. There was a beach  
belonged to my mother's and my father's Sundays. We walked there.  
Sometimes I was between them, holding both their young hands.

Then she turned old, and he was infirm,  
rotting from within. I was the shunt of wreckage,  
saffron-blue flame, versicolored

mermaid of the rocks,  
fitted  
for the abyss.

One by one, I took from my fingertips the limpet shells  
I had worn like small roofs over touch. I stacked them, so many  
tunics on the beach. My cinder cones.

Plum-hot the anvil, lava, the volcano's rise, ours  
is a sky of yellow crumb and ash. Amorphous, still I am consuming,  
yea and nay, and consumed,

but shaken loose: empress  
of undertone, perilous foam,  
creek in its natal dark.

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BETWEEN PAGES OF THE DICTIONARY

Lift away *lurk* and let *lowbrow* breathe . . .  
Language has lingered into slow scents: a library's  
mottle-storming dust, cupcake breath,  
inked leather. A luna moth left too long.

Nights so interminable can last years.  
Cradled between *wheedle* and *wheel*,  
*watermark* and *watchtower* wait in the dark.  
Quietly bedded close, *wetnurse* went ahead:

she kisses *welterweight* without ceasing. Ever  
breaching, *whale* meets *westerly* skin to skin,  
and *wetly*, *wetly* (*damp*, *dank*, *moist*  
in this desiccant dwelling) loves *well-worn*.

*Worn well or by much use*, o hackneyed thumb,  
seek me, thin as water's moment  
and still undefined. A shift has begotten  
a transient beam. Quick, unload the seam.

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## ELEGY

Like some fall into the army,  
the quick of commerce,  
or whoredom, shield, the battlefield  
soil, I fell

into the clear faces of a transposing  
river. I woke to my father's  
unprotected poverties, was schooled  
by the slow

unbraidings of his dreams. I know  
it is only luck to be unmistakably  
loved. Affection bloomed,  
trumpeting the hillsides,

the orchard valleys, and stopped  
itself short of pillage. Guarded so,  
vines suckled sun and drew winds  
to the root.

Low clouds now, darkling a June  
rain. A tender roof of tin.  
I care. I am listening  
for the fruit.