

Katherine Shelton

Jake, the too-angry child



Your little body is boiling.
I can hear the screeches before they pierce the air.
I want to pour your hot water over dead leaves
and drink the pain away.
I'll burn my tongue. Just steep with me.

You and I define danger:
One coil of hair longer than the rest,
A bundle of overgrown braided cells,
liable to get caught in riff raff or to whip
any who wander too close.
You groom your lashing hair at the back of your head,
Out of sight out of mind.
Mine toys with my cheek,
Weighing my gaze downwards.

But I fear I adore you,
Gapped and clenched teeth.
You hurl a dodgeball with murderous intent.
You screeching brat,
Sneaking my embrace as if escaping from Alcatraz.

And now our wards are continents:
Your side for the kids who scream too loudly to listen,
Mine for teens that are razor-blade-friendly.
I am stuck.
Not quite a woman.
Not quite you.
Not quite healthy.
But quiet all the same as you apologize profusely
for walking in as I changed out of bloody clothes.
I am quiet still
When you express relief
that I am not your sister
who would have surely “socked” you.

I no longer wish to be cured
while you boil
and fester
lacking vocabulary to explain
that all the science,
all the moon-walks, all the wars,
all the pills accumulated
can never unshred a boy in Bedlam.