

BEAST

poems by Frances Justine Post



Augury Books
New York, New York

Self-Portrait as Beast

I put on my face. This one is wolfish,
 covered in whorls of black and gray fur.
My whiskers flex and fall; I comb them

 with my nails. My teeth are broken in places.
 Depending on the light, I am glossy
or made of shadows. When I walk, my skin,

loose, follows with a slight delay. What did I wear
 when we were new? Must have been the curly
one, lambish. Later, I was the blind ostrich,

 my face a sad block, all eye and beak, hiding
 in the sand. I chew my paws and pace
the bedroom. My fur is furrowed and sweaty.

I pant. I pant and growl softly, bare my teeth
 at you on your way out. I heard everything,
do you believe it? The uneasy feeling

 of a stranger by your side. Turn around;
 I am the stranger. Go on, run away now,
run away on your dainty little hooves.

I.

Self-Portrait in Maelstrom

Knocking at the window, a splash interrupts us,
your tongue in my ear. The water rises

like clasping, a familiar bite of salt.
Now part of the eddying, we are swept

with the tide to the living room.
There's the writing desk walking forward

surrounded by its cloud of ink; grandmother
unearthed in her silks. Sometimes my leg

will go a little dead when we are breathless.
We are pulled up the whirlpool of the spiral

staircase, through the French doors a stingray
has smashed like a bird that sees only open sky

in the glass. The rooms make sense now as caves;
the roof has lifted. What will we see

when morning comes? A second birth?
Forests of kelp? A hook on a dangling wire?

A gull preening on a sargasso raft,
that wicked bird always laughing? A boat

pushes towards us. It's a trap. Do you feel
like trapping or do you just want to live

on the salt? The sail rent, the paint
a dirty pool. The clouds, red when we met.

Twinspeak

Hold our feet, our four that are not fingers.
We so like to be petted. We've been missing

you. We sick, gray, would like a distillation
of all experience we might miss so better

to make the decision. What we're after is
I want a boat-ride. I want Alaska. Everywhere

is full of greenery; the difference is the sea
level, but how are we to divide? We saw

the hawk perched on the thrush—still flying
however pinioned—and did nothing.

This means that we identified. So who
the hawk and who the thrush? No one wants

to be the hawk but otherwise the equation
wouldn't work. Won't you join us? With you

coming around, the stars must necessarily scratch
the sky, meaning we are still, the rest keeps moving.

We'll take the blue from your eyes and give it away
so we are more alike. Hold us first in your way,

with warmth and a certain ambivalence. We'll quiet
then we'll not. We'll speak in the singular.

Self-Portrait as a Pack of Hounds

We move as one, a sea of eyes, yellow,
unnatural, our ears dangling down, our paws
slipping on the dried leaves. We're made to want you.

Your face in a snarl, your red coat, your black-shod
feet tucked up to clear a ditch.
Why did you leave us here? We don't know where this is.

We slobber and peel down the trail. Our noses searching
for your pulse. Nuzzle, growl, we dig
and fight and dig, crashing through the brambles.

Your scent a fever. Some fluff from your tail,
red-tipped gray. Our love a frenzy.
What will we do when we have you?

Abandon

Last night I dreamed my legs stopped working. I was
your doll. You dragged me everywhere, first by hand,
then by hair. Later you dropped me off a cliff,
which is when I woke. You've migrated to my side.

The trouble with this night is it's come before anything else.
I won't say it, but I'm asking *will there be more?*
More silky, more abandon, more cheek
to cheek, more tumbling, more pivot and pressing?

And, furthermore, who are you? Don't wake,
I won't ask. Out the window, it sounds like rain.
The all-weather house sparrow perches
on rusting steps. She is warbling (listen) *stop it stop it stop it.*