

Kendall McKenzie

We Didn't Play House

A swallowed hook wound
round the rib bones of a bass from my childhood
creek. The fish, us children, all
came for dinner.

I apologized. I offered my hand,
pushed it in and risked a puncture.
I let the fish eat my arm, not stopping

at the wrist. The fat white underbelly
filled with my child-bones. Dilated and stretched
along the grain of the scales and then I
dug my feet into the mud bank while
the fish gave oral birth to me.
I held up the red-soaked hook,
thrashing with evidence of new life.

Thunder Hole, a Photo Op

"We were hungry before we were born."—Fever Ray

We are more primordial than sea lettuce and drag
rubber soles across the cracked shore side. Hurry,
the next wave should be good!

The tour guide warned us to stay
back from the cliff. A rogue wave
claims from the viewing platform a child and mother.
I see them cresting a few miles away.
They must be mermaids, unafraid of snagging
on the current's many teeth.
Any sort of soft cloth
or human contact must raw their skin.

If I hold the camera this way,
at arm's length, I'm a self-portrait
framed up with the crash, the waves that growl
and hiss like a cloud's starved belly.

The kidnapped two roll under the world while we
stand and shake into coats and hats
on top of Earth's organs.
This rock is a kidney. This rock, a nerve.
Thunder Hole is a throat that clears
and we edge closer for the next wave.
Wool to flesh. Skin to skin.

Wax Magnetism

A baby bee girl writhed, belly upright
on my palm. She swam out of the glass hive
as if through slush.
She stilled in the wind.
Wide-nostriled state fair
children refused to hold her.
“She won’t hurt you,” I explained. “She can’t yet.”
I tweezed my fingers around a few more sisters, rolling them
together for comfort. Covered in field soot,
yesterday’s amber, they scoured
the cracks of my hand like tapping the veins of a bloom.

Another bundle of children toed, almost sneaking
up to the booth. I offered them
two handfuls of worker bees, girls
who split wax
sacs open and pried themselves
from the tacky brood. Four little girls placed
grubby hands on the glass and warmed against the soft
beat beat beat beat of microwire wings.
Their eyes were diamond pinpoints, black and focused.
They were still young.
Guard, mortician, nurse, forager.
A hum shivered through the group,
a vibration in each body.

For the Love of Taxidermy

I'm trusting the raccoon in your yard to keep
you safe. She's fond of you
and your walks together. Let her be
your neighbor and don't damage her face.

Keep her real parts trophied in ethanol.
She is the shape of an apple, top heavy
and built to carry. Let her hind legs harden
with muscles from surveying the border
around your house. Call her only sweet names, then fill her

with affectionate white noise and ether
to weigh her down. Use the correct strength
of jawset. If you find the raccoon tongue
to be too clunky, use a sharp coyote tongue.
They're practically cousins.
Use the albino red lenses. They see better
in the dark. Install in her

your rage, your prosthetic lion heart, your vacuum. Take comfort
in her woody musk, of wool blankets, rain, rust.
She won't need a leash. To her
your voice sounds like bite marks,
the kind of chewing used to groom fur.

When the border alarm string of jars
clangs with invasion, she'll serve
as a distraction and lead the intruders off with
the view from behind
of her ringed tail, the burning
dance of a bull's-eye, away
and away from you.