

Jeanne Stauffer-Merle

The Heart of Tarantula Is Not a Storm.

It is not a trap of whirlpool
where the lost go to feed
 the lost are curve without current
 and wave into frightened peaks
 of forgotten intent)
No. This heart is a secret.
Like a word made only of whispers.

The heart of tarantula is a hunter
but not of the hunted.
Its blood smells the body of yearnings
 that ghosts left to rot
 in the arms of want.
 Its blood eats blood
 but it is not the thirst of the vampire.

The heart of tarantula has no voice
but its flesh has the consistency of song.
You feel it hum between the ridges of your tongue
and blow into your cheeks
quench your lungs and smooth your veins
until you are a secret too
not lost not found
of neither hunger nor reason.
The heart of tarantula is the desolation
of a shattered compassion.

Tarantula says,

My length is the split of star.

Not like the crab's mortared spine
with a leftover limb scraping along
a body it will never see:
the absurd marbling of weight upon grit
without gain or defeat.

My groin stretches the sky.

Not like the iguana
whose belly reaches only to its back
the face caved as crater but porous and full like water
petrified. The iguana says,
Don't dream of the place outside your fingers.
Don't pray for the sun.
When the iguana speaks it is a parody
of movement and choke.

My hands are grates and nothing like the palm of bird
holding a bowl of hearts
wailing for rain.

Now in the time of no-time
there is neither womb nor death
just a scar of halo
much like before all time
before rocks eroded themselves to orbits
and clung to a fire that shrunk
to a knot of night.

There are eight ruinations of light:

The first is the windbreak that cannot stop eating the wind.

The second is the sunken and the swamped.

Inside the third lies a rainbow of curtains
like burning guillotines.

The fourth: what vibrates just beyond—
the voices that whisper with invisible whips.

The fifth is the gradient of past hungers.

The cheat of float is the sixth.

(The rigidities of waters the seventh.)

Eight is Tarantula.

One day I stretched myself until my legs snapped off like warm roots
one by one by one by one by one by one by one by one.

I crawled out of the ground

and was Spidersun.

(Spidersun is a poison but the only thing alive).

(Spidersun is a number that cannot begin or end
with one.)

One is the magic of old dreams.

There is no one now.

I am the many-throated.

When I opened my mouth at the beginning of the no-time.

When I raked raw the center.

When I spoke like the light of corners.

(And the disc of shadow eclipses the dawns.)

(And I walk my pace. And I walk apace and apart and among.)

And I am the bit by blackened bit.

Until there is no more of full.

Until there is no more of empty.

Until the only air is the breath

of Tarantula.