

my own animal
by Jennifer Garfield

I.

i could have been	an ark of faith
an ocean	flayed into flames
i could have wrought	darkness into light
could have nursed	the righteous
on velvet milk	fed psalms
and tender meat	could have birthed
soliloquies of	holy flesh
bounty	in blessed brine
but you cast me out	blind as Samson
burnt the seas	to shivered glass
named me demon	and built the world
a vessel of shame	a chastened flame
i could have been	your good mother
unscissored	unburdened
my story written	on the waves
my name Delilah	my fate scribed
a kind of paradise	in the mind
i could have been	everything you wanted

II.

all i wanted was sea-beasts. sonar.

the crest of majestic waves. all i needed

was symphony and shipwreck, fossil songs

to break barriers of space and time. needed to know

what Jonah heard inside the whale, what he deciphered

in the gnashing yawns, gulps, the stomach-slosh

as he sailed through open sea. i needed the sighs

from his lungs, a man-ship surviving on sonar breath,

a sloop of solitary sadness. can a whale taste sad?

is it salty or sweet? i once met a woman who was never

sad. never sad, i think, my mind dark as the ocean's gate.

i, too, could have been a good pilgrim, Jonah's wife

content without name or ceremony. disappeared

in the sea-glass depths. i wonder if Jonah absorbed

the whale's dna, and when he emerged from that saliva

dungeon, could always hear the faint

strain of sonar, his whale's sadness,

the entire ocean in his ear.

III.

within the dimensions of whale
we mothers float quietly.

nobody says mother here.
diagnosis. rare disease.

who wouldn't want
to climb inside. to ricochet

between love and whatever
love eats. the whale is ravenous

tonight. hunger laps our bodies
like an inconsolable wave.

we love on it. the whale's
hum hum hum. nobody says

genetic. god's will. the tide comes.
the tide goes. we do our mothering

quietly. without need. make no noise
as we mend the shit world

and all the shit things
inside it. make our hands

a revolution. we wreck.
we raze. we light the seas

on fire and nobody sees
the blaze.

