

## Leda's Daughter

**Kara Penn**

I was a bird. I hatched from an egg.

My wings were grand. My wings  
were paper stars glued end to end.

My stars were out of reach and susceptible  
to water. My paper was pulp and supple.

From a new mold, a version of me  
with shoulder blades. I wore a gown of wing-

like material, down-soft at the neck, a swan  
white, hip-fitted and approachable. Men

desired me, men who shot  
arrows through the breasts of birds,

breathless with the chase, bleeding birds  
plunged into water, wet birds retrieved

In the soft, malleable mouths of dogs.  
I went to the water with purpose.

I came out naked, cold. I emerged  
wingless. I emerged and made

a dress with what was left.

# Becoming Tree

Kara Penn

A stadium of leaves applaud  
while I walked that path, all gold  
and the back of gold, branches  
baring their shimmering guts,  
slender foliage filtering down.

I was fragile then, counting  
empty, mapping places where  
bodies began, failed, released.  
Cored, the insides out, I held  
vacant after release of bone,  
red river, clump. I clutched  
the soft bodies of my dogs, lifting  
newborn-like weight and size.

I reassured heart beats through black  
pads of paws. They burrowed, barked  
through autumn— becoming path.  
How did I become tree, throwing  
wide and out my gold?

# Starfish

Kara Penn

Blood-red and lumpy.  
Wet, it lay  
on your small palm,  
not flat  
but almost.

The five arms, your  
five trembling fingers,  
your mouth  
a universal O.  
The handler

provided facts:  
*if a starfish  
loses an arm,  
another will grow  
in its place.*

Has evolution  
failed us?  
When we lose  
with what  
do we replace?

# Into the Hands of a God

Kara Penn

From the fifth floor window  
of the hospital across the street,  
innuendos of light and grief flicker.

Among the conversations  
of early diners lining street cafes  
a discernible inquiry lifts up  
into the hands of a god:

“Does it matter so much  
a woman’s guts can be removed  
and cradled in waiting arms—

so as to be split, cut, sewn,  
stuffed back into the cave of her body  
in no particular order,  
and she will live?”

Dusk falls shining and wondrous.  
Dizzy leaves are stuck among rusted grates  
only a sudden flash of rain will sweep loose.

On a hospital’s fifth floor, a person  
finds himself regretting humanness, loss.  
A secure heart is the only gift of order he’s ever known.

As darkness blankets and hospital lights gleam  
frenzied moths, wooed by the iridescent street lamps,  
press their bodies against searing bulbs.

Crisp husks float down like languid stars.

# Shoveling the Drive

**Kara Penn**

Unsteady hands twist the milk cap.  
Raw with loss. Over-ripe bananas  
bruised black, terrorist news

in Mumbai, four days of silence,  
our newest attempt at ourselves,  
15,000 cells, action-packed and drowned.

The best prediction of who we will be  
tomorrow is who we are today. Today  
I am me from yesterday minus thousands.

Tomorrow I will morph into something  
less. The doorbell rings with laid-off men  
carrying shovels. I refuse their help, do it

myself. I lift that snow and toss it. Pile  
and push it towards alley and gutter.  
Exhaust myself in a half-mile of sidewalk,

a cricket pitch of drive. I keep ten bucks  
in my pocket. I hold onto something  
for one day longer. Later, we'll buy

unripe bananas at the store. Two days  
from now they'll be sun-yellow.

# From the Frontage Road

Kara Penn

I missed the highway exit, turning early.  
No semi-trucks blaring by or complicated urban  
merging. Instead quiet, burnt out backs of commerce—  
warehouses in their grays and tans. Parking  
lots, discarded metal. Trailers. Chemical storage  
rusting through. Trees, gnarled and broken.  
Nothing clean or manicured. Trash,  
ripped canvas, leaves—reds, mainly golds.  
Water-smoothed stones in their pushed piles,  
debris swept down in flood. There, in broad open—  
belongings: flannel shirts, jeans, blanket, backpack,  
work boots, bludgeoned cans, cutlery, water jug,  
teddy bear with bright red bow. Then, the owner,  
stepping out from shadow, collecting each small comfort.

## Kara Penn

*Kara Penn lives in Denver, Colorado with her husband, three young daughters, and two dogs. She is the founder and principal consultant of Mission Spark, working with nonprofits, government, and philanthropic foundations to further the missions and social impact of their programs. Kara is the recipient of several competitive U.S.-based fellowships and holds graduate degrees from the University of Chicago and MIT. She co-authored the book *Fail Better*, which was published by Harvard Business Review Press in 2014, and was selected as one of the best business books of the year by *Business Digest*. She's participated as a 30|30 Poet for Tupelo Press, completing 30 poems in 30 days. Her poetry has been published in a variety of journals including *Ekphrasis*, *Rockhurst Review*, and the *Meadowlands Review*.*

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