

Barbara Ruth

Trace Elements

You're on your own in the labyrinth,
your reflexes starting to fail.
You are searching for Water, searching for Fire
Earth and Air are accounted for.

But where is magnesium, mercury, gold?
Do you know where your zinc is tonight?

You're tired, but you need to keep going,
Then you hear it! Wolf howls in dialects unknown
though you minored in Lupine Linguistics in college
that was long ago, in another land.

Still you're glad to know carbon-based life forms
are somewhere out in the night.
Your fingers curl into a shell in the stone,
you howl down the moon and keep on.

Six Mammals At Lunch

We meet up at Golden Lotus in Oakland.
Two don't know one, but that one knows two others.
Those two know us all.
One is a Beagle named Momosuke.
I think Momo knows three, but I could be wrong.

Two will fly back to Connecticut next week.
Two want to go to the Palestinian-Jewish hip hop concert tonight
but one is meeting her God-
mother and sister for dinner instead.

We order three salads
one soup
six spring rolls
one clay pot
five glasses of water
two sticky rices with mango
one tofu clay pot
one Teriyaki fake salmon
one vegan flan
one coffee
one tea
one diet coke.

When we're done, five of us hug. (Momosuke's on duty.)
The Connecticut ones make plans to meet later this month.

Four climb in two cars.
Momo and the wheelchair with purple turn north
The oxygen tank and the crutches head south.

I see us all, in complex permutations,
in cirrus formations
all the way home
where one of me crawls into bed.

(Not) the One Where We Drifted Off

I wake in an all white room, not the one where we drifted off.
She is already up, in the doorway, framed in sun. I shade my eyes to make her out.
“Let’s shell peas on the porch with Grandma today,” she suggests.
Both our grandmothers passed long ago, she must be speaking in code. If only I knew it.
“We could pour libations,” I try. “On the other side.”
She comes toward me, radiant smiles and she whispers,
“I know a trail, a way past the checkpoints, the guns...”
Out of bed and into my camouflage, I follow her down.
“Hurry!”
one of us signs as we slip through.

I still wonder how/why I awoke
in that all white room
with all/none of my things.

I still wonder if one of us is a spy
for one side
or another.

Enhanced Animal Magnetism

Have you recently moved to the world where goats rule? Let me know!
I have mapped all the rocks so you'll know which are already claimed.
Need reading glasses for your aging cat?
I'll grind her bifocals. I'll fashion bejeweled turquoise frames with a chain.
Ask for my help if you're drowning in stress
I'll radio my humpback whale friends, they will sing you through.

Even though it is lesbian camping season
text me, message me, call me any time.
Vaguebook me, I'll get it.
I will download your missives through software tattooed on my amygdala.
We no longer need the bird-killing, EMF-zapping cell towers.

Technology isn't the problem.
The problem is lack
of imagination.

Barbara Ruth writes at the convergence of magic and grit, Potawatomee and Jewish, fat and yogi, disabled and neurodivergent. She has performed her original work with Mother Tongue and Wry Crips Readers' Theaters, taught in California Poets In the Schools, co-conspired with DYKETACTICS! and blogged at NeuroQueer. She writes autobiographical fiction, lesbian feminist theory, and memoir, and is a poet laureate of Fabled Asp. She is 69 and lives in San Jose, CA.