

Babies and moths born at night

who don't yet know  
That life must be lived  
As much in darkness  
As in light  
Do you worship sputtering  
Street lamps like there's  
No tomorrow  
Until tomorrow comes  
And teaches you  
The meaning of the sun

### Refuge at Giza

I am the shade beneath the camel's belly.  
I am down-to-earth unlike my creator  
I am ice in an oasis like this one

Drink me, though, and still thirst  
Don't mistake me for my more acrobatic cousin, the shadow  
He who thrives off imitation. No, I am Shade.

Old time is stored in my lazy, cool protection  
Bargain for me underneath this hydrated creature  
in this land of pyramids where sun is sand-cheap

## Coastal People

Coastal people don't always live by the sea. They frequent it, and when they do, they like to occupy their hands. A book, a cigarette, both, or maybe the hand of another. I don't smoke, so I choose the book or the hand. I don't mind having one in either palm. That weight balances me. The book should be beach-fit. Already tattered, yellow from the cigarette smoke of someone, and written by a never-heard-or-seen-before author. A careful ghost who bears a name. Now, the hand should feel comfortable while it rests in yours. You don't need to have known the person for long—names are still not required as trips to the coast can arouse peculiar instances of spontaneity. However, you should feel safety by their grip. Enough to reciprocate it when waves crash toward you. The golden rule. Squeeze hands when waves crash. Don't worry about the book getting wet.

The author of the book should be of no distraction to those who walk by you. The book is merely a buffer between you and that crashing sea you sit before. 'Ocean' isn't a word in the vocabulary of coastal people, but 'sea' is abused. The sea is a literary place, much more than the coast, which is why coastal writers have appropriated its nature in their musings. The distinction between the sea and the coast is the line between. It's approaching imaginary, but at some point the sea becomes the coast. Wherever that line lives, however thin, that's where writers perch themselves. A step behind, that's where the rest of the coastal people reside. The writers think they have the best view of the sea because they're the closest. They think the salt spray makes their words have an edge. Usually, the sea erodes the truths they try to profess. The smart ones retreat into the ambiguity and hideaways of poetry. The smartest ones don't write at all; they sit above the perched writers, up on the tops of sand banks, nestled on cliff sides, or sat with their legs swinging from side to side on docks.

The sea isn't always in a rush to crash. The dock is where coastal people go when the sea refuses to be aroused by the moon. It's sacred. Worship there happens with the homely flick of a rod. Maybe fishing line bridges the coastal people to the sea, almost thin enough to be imaginary. But when it yanks, there's no denying that the line is there. Coastal people enjoy fishing to pair with their smoking, reading of ghosts, and holding hands. In the midst of these coastal rituals, their landlocked counterparts live differently tempered lives. *Truly landlocked people know they are*, Toni Morrison says, calling the sea 'ocean,' because they've never seen first-hand how inappropriate that word is to describe what's there underneath the swinging feet at the dock. I'd be troubled to trust the words of a coastal person describing their surroundings in a landlocked setting. But I'd smile at the eloquence of the coastal writer asking the landlocked one what they preferred to be called.

### When Mom and Dad walk

If you go early enough, you can't see your tread. Which is to say, you can venture far and mosey at the day's young hours, and leave all of your footsteps behind you. The dark light of morning can't hold onto its memory. The color of my shoes, gobbled up by the dark light. The beauty of *him*, despite tar skies, cloaks our surroundings in brightness. He walks with me too with footprints no less consumed than mine. We collect pieces of the trail in our soles as we walk. Taking soil and critter-hostages who know nothing of devastation, of such magnificent grief until we trample across. I remark at all the usual fixtures one sees on an adventure. Like how this butterfly is surely Mom, as it lands on my finger. And how I could bask there, next to love and minutes away from sunlight for all eternity.

## Cocooned

I once had a butterfly live in my stomach,  
just one, with a misplaced sense of humor.  
It took pride in its idiom, and could make me  
terribly nervous with a series of maneuvers done  
below my diaphragm. A sweet butterfly dance.  
When someone would ask of my anxiety I'd tell  
them of this butterfly dancing in my stomach.  
I didn't think too much about how it ended up there, or why.  
My stomach was the darkest place in the world that  
would stay dark forever. If I missed the womb like the  
butterfly missed its cocoon, maybe I'd swim  
for the bottom of the ocean, too.  
Or anywhere so solitary.

## Vegas

I noticed sensations seeping through your gauze over the course of short time. Leaving behind  
a sappy residue of discretion: exercise it, will you, squander it, won't you?  
Every dollar counts. Insert coins until your fingers smell like both sides of a dime.  
Believe in luck and in God and in love, but trust in your good fortune mostly.  
Don't return home from the night until you're certain you've made a profit off that feeling.  
But you're never going to be certain. Put your money down. Retract your fingers from that bet and run,  
make your money elsewhere. Put your money down (don't be bashful):  
cozy up beneath the neon shadows cast by fake palms. Don't you worship the smell of Vegas.  
The swirling nothing of this city senses life for the first time inside your chest,  
so, it won't leave without a foothold in your heart. Let addiction draw us near. Let it fray your intuition.  
Give this sensation its divine ascent, but know the risks well:

reciprocity/love/lust/sex/infidelity/  
danger/panic/shortenedbreathing/bankruptcy/...

Heartbreak.

Don't let the lights dizzy your heart in that nothing city.  
Pull the lever of the slot machine. See your payout:

panic/danger/ heartbreak.

Congratulations on your win.