The Lamb Essay

5) In yoga class last week, shoulders burning with chaturanga, my hot-

pink mat from Lulu Lemon soured with sweat, the teacher said,

*You are not your story,*

and I remembered my favorite fantasy—

4) Sex for years hurt I thought it was in my head

At 25 my legs splayed in stirrups the doctor said

*There’s a tear here*

All the doctors through all the years

That scraped the lining of my walls, palmed cervix, circled breasts

Not one had mentioned the rip

1) I say *no* and mean *yes* and we come together.

2) This fantasy, identical to what he did but this time I don’t freeze don’t float away.

6) to be the nymphet at pool’s turquoise edge

wavelets kissing my feet

with chlorine—

to flaunt my tick-size breasts the tiny hairs curling beneath polka dot spandex—

to rewrite the night that has become my story.

3) What’s strange is I felt

nothing—no pleasure or pain, to say it plain.

I went to Andrea’s bathroom and saw red river

my legs some already dried in metallic cakes

and I looked and looked.

7) With me he could be the boy in his woodshed

again toad croaking in his palms could be a row of red bicycles

up North Mountain Avenue his boy-gang riding till sunset and his mother

calls him in for lasagna and iceberg salad.

To return to that lost-boy palace a girlhood must be taken

and if you think my polka dot bikini and bone knees that made him burn has no roots

in the fear of death you’re a fool.

I watch *Lamb* with my father at the Montclair Film Festival a tale in which a man takes an 11-year-old girl to his childhood cabin in the deserts of California gives her a pale lace dress the rural romantics of *Little House on the Prairie* stitched into its seams walks her through firefly fields and head-high prairie grass they wade in a river fish silt from the floor let its minerals soften their fingers.

8)

After the film, my father says,

*He needed her to bring him back to childhood—*

The Dream of Boyhood,

which is really

The Cowboy Dream The Dream of Endless Summer The Grassy Twang Dream Our Myth of Muscle and Freedom. There’s a certain type of nostalgia   
 that can justify any trauma.

9) In my dream of consent,

we dream girls wink and proclaim

*It’s sexy-fun to be the victim*! *—*to know the hunger of the hunted.

Sad girl theory

goes something like this: I’ll collect

the important dolls of history, and by doll

I mean architecture of holes or girl-shaped museum,

and by important I mean the sad women of white myth—

Marilyn and Saint Catherine and all of our favorite

tragedies. Marni Ludwig says that we are primarily

*the slutty parts of the mind* and announces

that *her . . . concerns will be historical.* In other words,

she once stood in flip-flops and polka dot

dress on the boardwalk in a beachside town

and realized she was born into this world

with sexual power. The first myth tells how a girl

in a village tightened her bonnet against the cold.

She walked into the forest, strayed from the path

her grandmother had warned her to follow

and nailed the tale of a wolf to a tree.

The girl understood the best way to conceal

a vanishing is with fable. The second

myth—this one my own—recounts the day Jamie

walked into class with a Marilyn Manson t-shirt,

chain wallet clanking against her thigh, black lining each eye,

and I snickered loud enough for all to hear, *I bet she’s a cutter*,

Ohio’s sad girl fable in one snarky sentence.

Have you ever circled your cul-de-sac in December

and looked up at the moon between branches

and remembered the sailor suit and penny loafer shoes

you sauntered into the parlor wearing on the day your grandma said

*One strawberry scoop with extra sprinkles for my girl*

and winked at you so you felt like a queen

in your shiny digs and pink ice cream.

The memory is sad, of course, because she’s dead

and you loved her but the sadness feels good

because it connects you to your child-self

which means your fable and also your grandma’s

who also had a grandma so the memory

takes on the quality of ritual and ancestry—

a line of grandmas with sunhats and smokes

tucked between their red lips like pageant contestants,

graceful in their age, and you look

at the stars that break through the Wal-Mart-like glare

that saturates the street—you forget you’re missing

the episode of *Bachelorette* on which Kaitlyn will choose her final man—

you let yourself feel sad which has power like snow

has power and cigarettes and grandmothers.

Notes:

“To know the hunger of the hunted” is based on a line for Jenny Boully’s *The Book of Beginnings and Endings* (Sarabande Books, 2007): “I know the hunger of the hunted.”

“She . . . realized she was born into this world / with sexual power” is based on a line from Eve Alexandra’s *The Drowned Girl* (Kent State University Press, 2004): “She came into the world like this. A child with the knowledge of her own sexual power.