

THE MOONPATH

PAM PERKINS-FREDERICK

No matter where Ann stood,
the moon laid a path
to her feet.
Once, while trying
to climb the Norway maple
in the school yard,
another kid had told her
*"If you have enough faith
you can walk on the moon's path."*

How much is enough?
And how do you tell?

Walking back to the tent
through the fragrant dark
in New Hampshire that summer,
after campfire,
Ann smelled pine,
wet dock, draining canoes,
the damp cellar smell
of a lake at night,
and two girls slipped with Ann
from the crocodile
line of campers and padded out
onto the dock, grey
in the moonlight,
warm to the soles.
As always, the moon
laid its scissoring path
straight
to each of them.
Four, counting Ann's
invisible companion
whom they'd grown to accept,
as her had parents,
not knowing what else
to do with
the shadowless Celeste
waited for, left presents,
saved seats, given
jelly beans (*"Leave them
in the crotch of the tree;
she won't eat in front of us."*)

Ann said she was nearly ready
to try the path,
solid as aluminum foil
crinkling to the horizon.
They were all nearly ready;
faith bent and flickered
about them like a fire
in sighing wind.

Then Ann gave a high
funny whisper: *"She's
going to try it!
O stop her someone
don't let her --"* and
they strained their eyes,
almost able to see
a shadow on the short
dock ladder detach itself,
move over the bright folding
and unfolding. *"She's
doing it, she's walking
on the moonpath"*
and they could nearly see
a fainting, a dimming,
a thin blot moving out
on the rich and winkling
glimmer. Their shoulders
touched, they clasped. Ann
strained forward
from their arms. *"Celeste
did it, I can do it, I can!
I got faith, watch and see!"*

And she was down the ladder
stepping forward
from the bottom rung.
Communal faith soared
to a blinding knowledge
of walking
and the shame of not
having believed. The two
surged forward to the edge

of the dock as Ann's foot
met wrinkling silver
as Ann let go the ladder
beatific smile,
outstretched arms,
*"Celeste!
Wait!"*
and sank.

The rest was a confusion
of hauling her up again
and standing, all three
on the dock, listening
to Ann's dripping,
watching the moonpath,
clear of any darkness,
glow to the farthest edge.
"Did she really do it?"
*"Yes. I didn't think
she'd leave me."*
"But it was so beautiful."
*"Look! A cloud's covering
the moon, the path's
going! Can she
come back?"*

"No," said Ann, wet
straight-backed. "No.

Not now."

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OF SLEEP

PAM PERKINS-FREDERICK

Sleepless, I drift
with closed eyes in the dark.
See flattened, soft waves,
a surf gone drowsy,
swash on deserted beaches,
repeating its sweeps
that flatten to lace
and vanish
It's rolling shells,
nudging flops of seaweed,
a pull-push, slow burying
the still, silver fish

I can think myself
onto that liquid's
surface;
I'd be barely wetted,
no sinking.

I long to lean
into the water's cooling light clasp,
to let it rock me like a chip on the waves,
bearing me along
as if the lightest of burdens,
sliding me over rocks
as if the wave were a wind
lazily shaping a long banner,
coiling, curling.
A liquid unwinding.
Easing up the slant
of the sand
and washing back again.

No sleep?
That would be sleep.

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PILLARS UNDERGROUND

PAM PERKINS-FREDERICK

Imagine the river sliding
 along its bed
 in the forest,
 floored with roots and leaves
 rock-ribs and stones.
 Imagine the borders of it:
 grass hanging over like a child's
 too-long bangs, the under-bank scooped a bit,
 concave from the roll of the water.
 Imagine the water pressing against the bank,
 fingering the roots, nuzzling them,
 feeling how smooth they are,
 and how deftly they twist,
 bent here, forking there, slick and black
 beneath the surface.
 Imagine the river trying to swing on the roots,
 curl around behind enough to get a hold
 then sending out a concavity
 like a dug paddle's signature.
 Imagine the river not content, wanting more,
 tucking its ripple further behind,
 discovering that tiny hole,
 and the mud's washing freely,
 widening the space. Imagine the river
 excited, rubbing the roots harder now,
 wanting to open up earth behind all of them,
 scrubbing away the soil laid down centuries ago,
 working back to the root behind the first,
 and the next.

It's opening up secret caverns under the trees of the bank,
 halls of water lit aslant
 with a bounce of light,
 the trees' roots now pillars, a hall
 of pillars and rippling coins of light
 on the ceiling.
 Imagine the river playing,
 making happy sucking noises
 as it flows through the halls,
 stroking the roots,
 strumming them with its hundreds of cold fingers.
 Imagine the river opening up the earth
 all underneath.
 Imagine the whole world
 running with a cold humming
 a sub-vocal watery singing
 just beneath the grass
 underneath the towns and prairies,
 under the roots of mountains.
 Imagine it plucking the roots for music
 to sing to.
 Imagine it ecstatic.

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