1984

The Spoon

Ceci Miller

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Someone in my last dream
held out a nautilus shell and said
   The secret of your grandmother   It’s in here

But dreams can be explained
Before I slept   I’d found a picture of a nautilus
unhoused   a paunchy pink
opened   painfully nude
in the Smithsonian calendar of the days of 1983

Also pictured   a ceremonial spoon
with legs for a handle   Its feet
are thick and round like children’s feet
With the spoon standing   they pose apart on tiptoe
Lying down   the legs open for sex
I’d like to have a spoon like that

So the nautilus meant nothing
   Or else the shell becomes another thing
as the spoon with wooden limbs
becomes other than a spoon
Naked to the waist in my dream
I saw only the shell
not the hand that held it
nor any creature living   inside or out

Grandmother
I don’t want to share it   whatever it is
Too far inside that blushing
flesh   the squat chamber surrounds a hidden event
   and slowly   the mouths begin to sing
There is walking until the coals
light a circle of faces   Selah
Workmen   the tallest mountain does not dwarf them
They are bold   Their god is bold   good
   Selah
Whoever finds the nautilus
keep it  If it bursts open
I don’t envy you

It’s good to be here with a circle of friends
embedded together  all accidental
for as long as it lasts
There must be others like us
Are they also watching their fire?
Our feet will burn  We stop the dance

I turn the spoon in my hand
and the half-body turns
The calves are large  thighs slender
The face is blank (the well of a spoon)
but when you turn it  you feel the face turning
and you are ashamed