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On Being Eaten Alive

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enough to be and perfectly to be
(even as any saint or angel must)
the full, proliferating,
and ever-multifarious proof
of exactly that measure given

ON BEING EATEN ALIVE

You know the most terrifying ways—giant fish,
reticulate python, saber-toothed cat,
army ants by the hundreds, piranha
by the scores. One can imagine
being scarlet in the blood
of a lion or rolled as pellets
in a wolf’s belly or ossified
in the barrelled bones
of a grizzly bear.

There are those who have been snatched
away without leaving a trace
into the flames (efficient bowels)
of a pine forest on fire or a burning
barn in August and those
who have been taken on rough tongues
of salt, smothered and lost
in a cavern full of sea.

I have seen others disappear
without a cry, wholly ingested,
limbs and hair and voice,
swallowed up irretrievably
by the expanding sac
of insanity.
But I like to think
of that old way, the most common
and slowest, the body disassembled,
diffused, slowly, consumed—particle
by particle, stigma, gradually, by stigma,
cell by cell—converted carefully, transfigured,
transformed, becoming finally both
a passing grain of blue above an early
evening silhouette of oaks and an inflation
of sun in low October fog, both the sight
of bladed wind in beach grasses
and the sound of singing in the wings
of desert bats, becoming as close
to itself as the smooth night skin
lining the skull, as the white moaning
conch of its own hearing, the body
becoming gradually and remarkably
so indisputably so.

WHAT THE SUN GOD SAW
ONE SUMMER AFTERNOON

Looking long enough, right before his eyes
he saw the sheaths of leaf and tassel
and stem split and fall, layer
after layer, like transparent skins
from around each stalk, until all the barley
and rushes stood complete and naked,
a thousand narrow blades of white fire
bending and shimmering across the field.

And the smooth asters and sweet clovers,
releasing their outer shells of texture
and fragrance and color, became small perpetual
explosions poised on their glowing stems
in the dazzling roadside ditches.