

CREATION STORY

I was alone in the womb breathing the water of God through my little gills.

I came shivering—gasping to the light—my mother 's face a smear of pink.

To be held against a wall with her heart on the other side—this was my first sadness.

I loved the taste of all my Play-Doh—red was my favourite. Father

fed me pink grapefruit hearts on a tiny silver spoon—I tore each chamber apart with my teeth.

TEND

Get the ones that grow up between the cracks my mother says, leaning over the lemon balm.

She is a sweating, garden-gloved goddess with strong arms and I am pulling puny weeds from patio squares

thinking about cloud shapes, and the way that boy touched my back when he walked past me yesterday.

There are peppers, tomatoes, eggplants heavy on the vine but I don't see them. I see dandelions and cement

and I have barely finished two squares when Mom sends me to make sandwiches. Things are growing but I don't see them

until fifteen years later in Island Bay. It took the furthest place from home for me to put on muck boots and feed somebody else's

chickens in earnest. Now I place the tentacled roots of coriander and spring onions in a jar like they are holy, with a little water, facing the sun.

PSALM I

You know my father's name is John—impossible. Look at your little sea with whales smaller than ice cubes!

The sun was cold before you touched it, and now it rages love.

Why make almost gods of girls like me who hook the fish and stomp the grass and eat popcorn with glistening fingers in the centre row of the theatre?

SALT AND LIGHT

The first time he stopped by the house we were tall as his belt buckle.

I ride toward the Brooklyn Bridge from Harlem before sunrise.

I want to be clean so I need to be cold. When my lungs scream and sweat stings my eyes, it is almost over.

There was no coast to run to so how could we wash?

Cold black morning then grey until the sun blisters the silver buildings

and I am cold, surrounded by water and metal.

His stomach is a barrel. We are too small to see his face. His breathing is rats chasing a can in an alley.

Every one that falls (an apple in his yard) is devoured.

I want to be clean so I need to be cold. When my lungs scream and sweat stings my eyes, it is almost over.

I am clean and full of salt now. I am an ocean.

LOG NO. 1

There is no blanket of fog. I am not running through the woods today. Last night I was swimming and could hear bullets in the water around me. They sound like *zhzh*, a pleasant sound. The night before I could feel a man behind me before I saw the shadow of his hat. He grabbed my arm and I ran and threw myself down in some shrubs. I could hear a truck or a van racing toward me. I woke up safe, but barely. I used to have to watch people die in my dreams. I could hear, smell, feel their blood warm on my shoulders. Bev from high school said that was nothing. Her sister used to attend her own funeral in her dreams, night after night for a whole year. That was after her parents divorced and her stepdad moved in. He was a taxidermist. She showed me the basement of hooks and stretched skins of deer and coyote. We weren't supposed to be down there, drinking her mom's Kahlúa in our milk.

LORETTA

Who doesn't hope for a fishing net to come heavy from the water with an old locked box caught in the net?

You might ask how did the box swim into the net? And I might say

that is between the box and the net.

Some other secrets come up from the deep.

I have had to open the door—to let out dust of another century. It floated toward our boat in a sealed urn, and when I brought it inside opened it like a genie's bottle.

I mean, Great Grandma danced for money and the music still plays after dusk. I am the woman who dances for free. Lets the piano rattle even after the sun shines through all the windows.

And when I open the door again it's for air, into another country. I can feel her smile

where trees are pink and the lavender sky smells of salt and sea and the box on my stoop is still dripping.

DESCENT

Inside the house where I grew up, black mould spotted the walls. It was years before we knew it was inside us like lichen on rocks.

On a starry night, do I choose the fruit that's ripe or wait alone, for one other human, burning like a roman candle in the dark? There he is,

hands on the other side of the glass, waiting. There is the question of table or bar, forever or an hour of open doors all leading to the same room.

If I was a real woman walking toward him across the floor—but the oysters are cold, dead in their shells, us not speaking.

Here I am, floating above the earth as it yawns, limp roots crinkling the air—

Mother's friend Jill is packing my doll house telling Mom what an asshole Dad is (they have never met) asking, aren't I happy she's free? There I am without a mouth screaming or in bed beside a stranger, waiting for another storm to break. Great Grandma's china teacups, one fight at a time, were dropped onto kitchen tiles.

Now the gallery is well lit, my collarbone on display—I can see the shine of something, waiting in the dark and I can't say if I will run toward it or away.

REMNANT

Once I said, I want to be a lawyer, a doctor, and a ballerina—

I woke twenty years later writing these poems.

"... an intricate weave of themes, motifs, forms and sound effects that builds tension between dark and light, home and out of home, the personal and the distant."—Paula Green

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Amy Leigh Wicks holds her PhD from Victoria University's International Institute of Modern Letters. Originally from New York City, she is the author of *Orange Juice and Rooftops* (2009) and her poems have appeared on *The Best American Poetry* blog, in *Sport, Ora Nui*, and *Ika Journal*. She lives in Kaikōura with her husband.



