

MARY GILLILAND

The Whole Body

If the whole body were an eye where were the hearing? – 1 Corinthians 12:17 Gideon Bible

On one of those daytrips from paradise sisters
couples father-sons go for Who are you:
fills in the idling – *You could have got to the top*
He isn't good enough – Like mangrove pods
those voices rooted suffering the most hospitable
conditions Let them rock on the wave without anchor
For mouth and ear transpire fossil sorrow
Stay on this water

Captain Shari cuts the engine We drift We rock
The sea today endless, without ripple could be
the dream of a lifetime Like the moment something
is yours after doing, effort imitation, acerbation
this absolute attention is abiding has no striving
In the glass of water's surface brisk, flashing
hundreds of yards from the hull one fin bearing
the moment

Fins at three o'clock nine (Boaters use time
as direction a dial on the water) Two curve
a tandem of muscle Backs cantilever like cutouts
halfway toward brilliance What shines shines darkly
One dolphin flashes white belly fifty yards from us
flips nose toward the water Its narrow tail
flukes the sky Elegant air cushions space between
each of our vertebrae

Captain Shari amplifies in alto-soprano
Parsley Sage Rosemary and Thyme (Is the sway
down or a back and forth (air
sucks past teeth) Stay on this water) *Amazing*
Grace her next track The ring of fins bobbles
Time hanging a pewter line at rest on water
the cochlea's feedback spiraling south
of the brain

One curved back doubles another in play A track of
 Brightman arias a dome foundationed on horizon
 Suffer the spear of – *If his predilection is unhappy*
If she can accept things she could change – remorse
 for the ancestors those stillborn vows An
 equidistant rim the sky-divide from ocean
 the lower eyelid of creation Every moment tandem
 in the mirror

The base of the skull is like the skull pieces
 not unmoving bone Fluid cushions the axis
 and atlas (Helpless – those who might have
 blessed us – judging the camera the boyfriend
 less than the possible vocation, mate
 seeing us Somebody in their minds' eyes) See
 here then the sea Hear the lightest of burdens
 burden the light

They are smiling Round the tiller with the captain
 in this tiny shell this spit of a boat stand
 three women, two men and a boy becoming man
 A pod gathers close to the songs Shari broadcasts
 They being dolphins smile naturally
 Our diaphragms domes in our bodies
 suffer in time with their smiles the melody raised
 rung on the water

– *Turn a deaf ear* button your lip against what
 you must *Zip up your mouth* for the sake of
 the family – Eyes dream in our heads Captain Shari
 treads her tourists lightly: Only if you're asked for
 No swim if the dolphins want to play alone
 or feed Diving and surfacing one side of the keel
 to the other the bright mammals spy on us
 Shari waves us to the stern

In goggles and wetsuits approaching the step
 into space that is water no song is pervasive
 accidental or swift as the secondary oil pump's
 gallons misdirected spilling blue in their faces
 The dolphins all muscle not silver but steel Gone
 And the sea stranded glass: Let
 family be what it must For what it makes
 or is made of

Because in the Leafpile I Pitchforked a Yellowjacket Nest

Bites on my body I can stand, but not on yours.
Like anyone I think I'm built to last.
But I can't articulate your false step
nor right the ladder, level the tipped motorbike.

A few welts on you scar me with gravity:
agonizing seizures from a mistaken backyard herb,
lightning-detonated newly-painted house
the evening I stay late at the office.

Thumbs of fire massage my back
as I run across the lawn, stripping the shirt
that presses like a sheet against me.
You ice the wounds. They do not swell.

I propose to feed my back to angry bees
then to their grandsons, their great-grandsons:
take this red flesh instead of my love's body.
Prickled and confused, I straighten up.

There was that winter Saturday, that
dusk the afterimage of a Frankenstein matinee
when the top row in the cemetery wall stretched
stone points level with my cat-eyes.

I'd walk back and forth, back and forth.
The hand sliding over the jagged spikes paused
a fingerprint from the skin of my neck
knuckling limbo, neither movement nor dirt.

The Bargain

I forgive the young doe for eating the blackeyed susans,
for hosta tops bitten just as the flowerheads formed.
So intelligent – she waited for the sweetest mouthfuls.

She's the first deer to stand, to let me sing to her.
A few brief chews, then she lifts her head like a bird,
walks off calmly into the woods after swallowing fallen pears.

This is a good house. We let out a milksnake curled in the
basement
and moved in. Five years ago a stag browsed six-foot burdock.
Above their spikes antlers rose before he bolted.

The animals go before us, prints marking woods edge and trail
and the fair trade of the forest: lettuce and green beans.
Fence wire bends where cleft hooves sank, darkening moist loam.