

Carnivorous

My wife is finishing her bath. She stands
with each small foot
in its own zinc washtub, belly dripping suds
onto the wooden floor.
Kettle still glowing,
a ladle rests on the bucket,
bead of water gathering at the lip.
Hungry, I can hardly bear to watch. On the midway, a talker drums

the tip, scans for boys sidling
the crowd, long awkward
wrists, glaring white creases of dungaree hems let down and let down
again.

Boys—just old enough
to roam in packs—who, having seen a sister's white-flesh
bared
by rolled sleeves or the pink calves
of a cousin bending over the laundry, will pay
to see more:
a snake-girl's sinuous forked tongue;
a tattooed and bearded lady;
a woman with four legs—a reckoning silence
followed by snickering glances. A ten-in-one show, they'll pause
at other booths:
a frog boy rolling cigarettes with his lips;
a man who sips paraffin and breathes out flames;
a gaffed mermaid, half-fish, half-fetus;
and the eager geek, live chicken in his hands, biting off
the wild-eyed head. But the finale:
my wife.

Most will see more than they desired—a human mountain, marbled
slabs of thighs and breasts—she'll dwarf
their ill-proportioned bodies,

farmer's arms attached to boy-skinny shoulders.
But there's always one who imagines—hand hard
in his pocket—the rise to her summit;
how easily she could eat
a man. How he could burrow, be swallowed.
These are the boys she watches, those with a taste for sizeable
beauty,
who rise to the beckoning honey trap
of her kinked finger
and knock at our trailer door, sweet with ardor, fragrant as meat.
They think she's as gluttonous as they are—they don't know better:
wide-eyed,
farm-fresh, tender
boys: warm as birds, thrashing in my ravenous hands
and bloodied mouth.