

Michael McDowell

Julia at Lost Lake

She cups blueberries in her hand
As if they were a broken-winged bird
Which she eats morsel by morsel.

Long coils of her light-brown hair
Twist and curl down her shoulder,
Across the orange life vest tied loosely in front.

Ten years old, she's comfortable and confident
Standing above the Old Town canoe beached by the blueberries
In the volcanic gravel of the far shore.

At her bare feet in the water
Blue dragonflies, rough-skinned newts,
Kokanee probe and vanish.

Alder and devil's club crowd the shore at her shoulder.
In the distance ghost trees here and there whiten
The dense green hemlock August.

From her own palm she plucks and tastes the world
And then shakes remnant leaves and stems like confetti
And climbs in to fly across white caps and swells to the waiting dock.

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Sand in the Sheets

My father had no use for the beach.
He complained of sand in his shoes,
Of overcast and fog and run-down houses,
And at night of sand between the sheets.

He liked the beach best with sun on his back
Looking down the fairway of his imagination
From a golf course tee in summertime Portland
With a wood in hand and sand confined to traps.

Yet most Fridays each summer he'd drive
Five hours on single-lane highways of slow-moving cars
Through mountains and tidal plains and onto the ferry
To join his wife and kids for two days and nights.

With his wife he walked the beach and ate sand in his food
And while my siblings slept in adjacent beds
Quietly conceived me in the beach house attic
Despite sand in the sheets and the fog.