

*I Used  
to Be  
a Pisces*

*poems*

CAMILLA  
GIBB



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## *Organ Meat*

I spent years with a therapist  
who encouraged me to unravel  
the ways in which my mother  
had failed us.

I was resistant

preferring to listen to a butcher  
who kept steering me  
toward better cuts of meat.

Only once I was led toward the organs  
did I realize I was eating  
my own tongue.

## *On Black Lake*

The bulk of my belly  
an awkward manoeuvre  
of limbs and lump  
down into a kayak

the quiet dip of paddle into depths—  
a dark lake made darker still  
by black shadows

the impenetrable surround of pine.

I felt only the menace of it  
as a child, my trespass  
in an unfamiliar country.

I carry you now  
afloat in my water  
a thin membrane between  
us and our depths.

The paddle breaks the surface  
rings radiate with our presence

our eddy in time.

# *Quitting England I*

We left the country where I was born  
before I knew of countries

only fragments

a thatched-roofed cottage  
plump-breasted pigeons  
the ancient tortoise who dared a life  
among lettuces

I would miss

not the country, not the village, not the children.

Not too young to be aware of our stench.

The borrowed car my father drove to  
Guildford Station to catch the 7:15 to Waterloo—  
the humiliation of return on the 5:15

the house his in-laws relished repeating  
Belonged  
To  
Them.

My father's head grazed the ceiling,  
rage muzzled by thick plaster—

a state of siege  
that lasted

until he quit this life for Canada.

In his absence, the animals.  
The animals, the insects, the rain.

## *Night Music*

When the baby was  
small and not sleeping those  
long nights of winter, I would strap her  
into the car seat and drive north  
uphill, to richer parts of town  
the trunks of mature trees wrapped  
in Christmas lights, drapes wide open

the crunch of wheels quieting  
on ploughed streets  
new snow floating  
wipers low.

If these rhythms didn't lull her  
a CD—an EDM compilation  
my brother left in the car  
before leaving for good

bass loop heavy, rumbling our ribs  
rising pitch, percussive pulse  
the promise of something yet  
to be lived

my daughter's eyelids fluttering  
lured into a trance shared  
with partiers in Ibiza,  
islands I have never been  
never will, but her future is  
full of places and people not here.

## *Quitting England II*

There was a loo for tradesmen  
cold tile floor  
where I would sit in summers  
sent from Canada

back against the door, ivy crawling  
through the window

the comfort of wood lice and spiders  
and damp pages of Enid Blyton—

boarding schools  
tennis matches  
Arabian horses  
midnight feasts  
ginger beer and  
a wild Spanish girl  
named Carlotta.

My grandmother will bring tea  
in a chipped mug at eleven  
placing it outside the door  
on a tray.

No porcelain for me either  
I will tell my father  
when I am home.

## *Not One*

A ghost in the car seized the wheel  
driving straight into the wall  
of a factory that made mannequins

my father employed to weave  
human hair into plastic-scalped  
replicas of Ursula Andress

fluorescent nights spent with needles  
pierced his hand on occasion,  
some of the bitterness leaking out.

He'd lost the job in ad sales  
the year before, after HR sent him  
for psychiatric evaluation

so proud of that report  
he sent a copy home to his father—  
he would not be allowed to work  
with people ever again.

He didn't like people much anyway  
but work with his hands  
was blackening his insides  
his skin ripening bruised-plum.

A ghost in the car seized the wheel  
he told my mother, arriving home  
two hours late one morning.

*How am I supposed to get  
the kids to school, then?*

He shrugged. *There must be a bus.*

This would become a mantra for us.  
To anywhere, there must be a bus.

SAMPLE