

Winter 2008

Strange Litany

Katie Peterson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Peterson, Katie (2008) "Strange Litany," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 68 , Article 22.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss68/22>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in CutBank by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

KATIE PETERSON

Strange Litany

Two monarchs smashed together
on the petal fluttering like that.
Summer's terror almost over,
the long days, the families
by themselves, worlds
so intact it hurts not to break them.
And also that we
have been guilty of such
happiness, guilty in the sense
we wanted more of it
as soon as it came.

*

Civilization: a spot on the map.

Road trip: whether to go
to the battlefield
where they won only to lose
the next day or the one
where they lost for good.

Falling asleep: it can't be
I've written all these beautiful
things about you
and you haven't understood
a single one!

World: we made it round
to put a mirror
the shape of a circle
between our halves.

*

I wanted to know
there was a design.
Not a designer, I was perfectly comfortable
without the maker
micromanaging the form.
Liked it better that way.
Not a designer, a design.
Also a way to alight
upon it in the mind.
I wanted to know that too.
When I said that to you.
you looked at me like I was someone else.

*

There's the first
monarch, holding forth.
Nurturing the truth
by sitting on it
until it goes away.

*

If it's true about humility,
that it's wanting
to hold forth
without exerting force
I want it anyway, want it worse
than a case of liquor
made from the color
of the wing of the monarch.

*

No fair for the dark oak
to claim the butterfly
when the butterfly
wants the lavender. No fair
for you, distance
to claim sight because the rising
light places the hill
that was once close in the middle
distance. No fair
for another body
to claim me partially,
head of a man and body of a horse,
leaving me so anxious
in a state of change
I fear I'll never want
to breed or make
a thing except myself.

Look at them! Both of them!
Navigating the garden
like it has something to do with joy,
purposeless
except for themselves.
I can't believe this! Look at one
flattening herself into a plane
of black, charactering
a line across the bloom.
Yes that's a hunger
not a joy, but there are those
for whom hunger leads
to virtuosity.
They chase us into woods. We call them gods.

Strange Litany

Ask me anything, I'll never say
I don't want to talk.
This isn't to say
there's no principle of selection.
I exclude what I like.

Now you ask about the soul.
Monarch with a hole
in the northwest corner
of its wing, a tatter
in the fabric, flying like that.
I should have expected it.
But the question: do you think
your soul is female? I could
never have expected, being
female, unused to you
or anyone else
using my name
to call me what I am.

End of summer, look how
I've turned you
into what I want. Beginning
of fall, first angular horizons,
look at the leaves of the aspens,
their backsides ready for it.
What turns around makes everything
a curtain on a stage
about to open up.

Queasy with sleepiness, right

before lunch, I watched
the monarch which had gone
to twice its size expand
its wings slower than it ever had.

I've a friend who says
the lamas of Tibet
find it comical
how much we hate ourselves.
I'd like to shift
from this shape
not out of hate but from delight.

But I'm not answering
any more questions.

I think you know, from what my legs did
and from the cry I made
how much I'd like
to become something else.

Ask me that way from here on out.

Strange Litany

Monarch you make
your orange assent to death.
How many times
should I look at you and should
I change my life?
And how much dexterity
can you really teach me?
Does your courage
even map onto these
worldly obligations
to friends, my job, desire
for some affection in the late
hours of the evening, etc.?

I can't put myself ever
in your head but when I lie
on your wing, my left eye
lets my right dart forward
as yours can do.

Don't ask something
with a lifespan
how to change your life.
Ask something you can't
believe ever lived.