

Joe-Anne McLaughlin

Loose Children

Those summer afternoons when the man who took only boys
would take her brothers for rides in his cruiser: out on the bay,
always too far
for them to swim in, she swam alone near shore, dreaming
the underwater dreams of children,
children for whom sex was still
as genderless as the universe,
the choppy bay waters, scaled and finned by light. Whatever
manner of creature she was those afternoons, it couldn't be human:
Monster of the Bay, her puny limbs lengthening into tentacles.

Demon of the Waters.

Or God of the Dock, her body bared and pressed
to its warm damp planks, the dock
creaking as it heaved beneath her, bleeding creosote — the heavy
sexual reek
of creosote and bay and rot. Unforgettable. For every vice there are
virtues. No? Here was a Vanity so thorough it excluded
Impatience or Envy. Her brothers
would share their catch
with her — sometimes fish,
sometimes baskets of crabs, and then the small change
the man always gave for letting him do what he did on them, which
hurt
no more than the soft suck of tidal mud
hurt down there at low tide when they played being clams.