After Walking Too Close to the Woods at Midnight by Traci Matlock

1

Not if the figure is hiding but when will she strike.

I bought a pair of anonymous gloves at the corner store last night: my fingers slipped in unsure up to the knuckle first, then so easy the whole hand thrust into the white cotton interior.

Like the time I sucked a peach pit

and inadvertently swallowed it. Startling, really, how quickly what is foreign becomes familiar inside a body

how if you swallow a stone you can trace the path it takes in you as if pushing the stone through dirt with one finger

then, suddenly, it is lost, pushed too deep in the ground to be recognized as ground or not ground as stone, not stone, pit, not pit, as you.

2

Sometimes I stand with my back to the blackest hole in the line-up of trees

hoping for it, swelling already in anticipation of attack, overcome by nothing

as great as my desire for loneliness, or

as great as my desire for lust so thick it is conflagration it is fist after fistful of hair the body turning red

everywhere it's not being pressed, held down or pushed back and in those places, flesh

fleshed out -

wet apricots in the bottom of a bucket smashed with the back of a spoon.

3

I cannot be the first one to define eagerness

like this: once I stuck my hand in a tree

and the shadows flew out of the birds

4

If you are patient enough you can eventually see in the pitchest dark.

The shapes of things are subtle, but at least they are shapes. You must still walk with your hands in front of you, protecting, what? Your face?

Once a car drove onto the grass field in the middle of the night, pointed the headlights toward the edge of the woods that dropped off into the bayou.

Nothing else happened. The car turned to leave and the tires carved a circle in the ground. It was all that proved he had been there. It was pitiful. It had the look of a face

in sunken relief,

but that was too easy. It must have been the nubshape of an eraser that never worked without leaving behind pink bits of its body.

5

Descriptions of treetops give you away the same way clouds do.

Tonight: One is the shape of the moon that rises

when it's not supposed to. One is a reflection of the field

below it – stretched out, de-boned.

I cannot be the only one to find someone else's chewing gum on the tree trunk and, forgive me, chew it.