

TWO POEMS BY LAURA HAYDEN MARRIS

THE TELLING

Tough calcium, a spine
of vertebrae, thick layer of shellac,
a lacquered skeleton of grey,
animal transformed to chalk,
serpentstone, the myth of a petrified snake—

you kept it on your desk,
artifact of a childhood
too far away for me to picture
except in photographs—you,
your two brothers,
one a loner,
the other less a loner
than you—trying to be good,
to learn the names of shells
and wings. Your father there,
the one who said, “What a story
I shall have to tell the boys
after the war.”

Little fossil,
fiddlehead of bone
grey rock for flesh,
curled segments like fingers
after a slap,

your father’s death so fast
that when you walked down the hall
to ask about your mother,
the principal only stammered,
“She sounded all right on the phone.”

Stiff lip of muscle, not mineral, not bone
you were still at school,
heard opera, drank the cocoa
you had been drinking
before the news, which,
though crusted over,
was not cold.

PINON

A road of dust and on it a woman stands
with her back to me, and the needles
of the pine turn copper at the base.
The road is narrow, the sky
white at the edges with suppressed stars.

The sunbaked plain, the plain of gentle grasses
is not an image of solitude without the tree;
without the tree, no fixture of scale.
The painter stands beneath it as beneath
an alternate sun, dark on the horizon,
the side of a planet in shadow.

It shelters her, as though
waking at dawn she could trade
the star for a daylight her eyes could contain,
the rising sun for the dying tree,
the furred branches curving upwards,
the flakes of bark running in fresh sap—

Pine bark like the ocean at night,
and the ribs of the tree, producing,
at all hours the tiny cones
like the fists of a child pounding the earth,
like a rain of apples scattering the ground:
fruit of an inhuman knowledge.