
Physical Anthropology

by Heather Varnadore

Assortive Mating

It's a dark house. The only sounds are
the arthritic snaps and pops of the floor under my tread.
Love is the sticky film I wash off my abdomen
in the close pink bathroom.
I warm a thin washcloth, wring it, rinse it again.

Inclusive Fitness

There are notches along my pelvic girdle.
I have studied this.
They come about from widening
and re-fusing during childbirth.
They are the scars on the inside that no one sees.
But I know what they look like,
have held someone's mother up to the light
to trace the tracks of atrophy with a forefinger.
I wondered, if like me, the woman from box #5
prayed for death as her bones wrenched,
and was amazed by her powers of creation.

Fossils

Flesh is boiled from bone.
It looks like mince meat or stringy beef brisket,
and it falls away so cleanly.
The skulls are all along one wall,
blanched and dry as toasted almonds.
Their jaws are fragile arcs splayed in front of them
and the teeth have a tenuous grip at best.
Nasal apertures and eye orbits are chipped
like cheap dinnerware by the hands of irreverent students.

Para-Mortem Trauma

“You are lucky that Mom and Dad
would not let you see her like that,”
my other sister said years later.
“You never would have been able to forget it--
she didn’t even look like herself.”
She was displayed only for the family.
Her skull had been reconstructed,
buttressed, I can’t think how.
They washed her fearlessness off when
her strawberry blonde hair, matted by blood and tissue,
was tediously cleaned and combed over.

The Human Cortex: Allows Reasoned Behavior, Memory, Abstract Thought

Later, in bed, after I finish in the bathroom,
I wipe the hot wet hope from my eyes.
But deep down in my marrow I know:
we are spokes and pegs and sticks.
Tinker Toys and Lincoln Logs
that we bounce off each other in play
until bedtime comes and we’re placed into boxes
and covered with lids.