

Jan Owen

SMALL

We have no gentle name
for you, small creature,
drawn awry by some dark resonance
as though you thought to play
too early with earth's other beings,
fish, fowl, seal,
as though you dreamed of sirens,
angels, inflorescences.

You bring us all you can,
tailed torso, shoulder fringe,
word of the void,
yet seem painstakingly complete
as if some instinct journeyed you out
to test the furthest shore
or who we are.

Three times I leaned to see
a neatly mundane form
swim out between my legs
and blink and breathe,
thanking every God
it was not you.

So I have known you only
as a chill in the blood,
and by report:
travellers' tales from the cold,
photographs in a medical book.
The details I could forget, but not
your wide-eyed baby stare
as if in a flash you saw
all the monstrous evil of this world.