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## Fat Stories

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# 7

## FAT STORIES

*Susan Stinson*

A door in my second-floor apartment opens onto a small landing. The doorway is hung with a soft, loose piece of screening. It is translucent. I put rain boots on the sill of the open door to hold down the bottom of the screen, so it doesn't let insects in. On this hot summer afternoon, the screen is billowing. Filled with wind, it curves like a belly or a sail into the room where I am writing, then it flattens and falls as the breeze changes.

I can see through the screen to a box of thyme growing on the landing and, beyond that, to the big maples and a willow across the street. The leaves of the trees are tossing and swaying. The thyme is woody and exuberant, shivering slightly, a sprawl of small leaves and purple flowers. I get up and reach past the screen to run my hand over the thyme as I would over the body of a beloved. This scents my palm. I disturb a bee.

Layers of screen, thyme, and trees blow in messy rhythms like breath. I have been looking at the thyme for years as I tend it; I've been looking at the screen and trees for decades. Their surfaces let my eyes rest in shivers of motion. All three of them – screen, trees, thyme – fill space in ways akin to how my fat body moves: how it salts the air with sweat, strains the fabric of efficiency, how a chair or a limb might crack, how life insists on itself in all its forms. That is a story I find myself recounting as I look up from my computer and gaze out through the screen over the thyme to the trees. The depth and ease with which the shapes and motions of my body are in conversation with the shapes and motions of the nonhuman world is a story that sustains my life.

There is a big story about fatness that goes something like this: a fat person is fat because of a deep inner wound, flaw, or weakness. She is eating her feelings. She has too many feelings, all the wrong ones. (All respect to and solidarity with people who have eating disorders. I am exploring a different story here.) The big

story about fatness affects people of other genders and no gender, but the way I learned it centered on women. Through the scholarship and writing of Sabrina Strings (more on this later), I recognize this story as disciplining white women into trying to fit a narrow, racist, physical, and moral ideal while also marking Black women and other non-white groups (a category with shifting definitions) of women as being inherently less than that ideal through an association with fatness.

I recently attended a Zoom conversation between Da'Shaun L. Harrison and novelist and memoirist Kiese Laymon around the release of Harrison's book *Belly of the Beast: The Politics of Anti-Fatness as Anti-Blackness*. Harrison observed that in Southern culture, Black fat bodies get read as being associated with women. They went on to say that this puts any fat person at greater risk of gendered violence.

A straight, cisgendered male painter once told me that he had been uncomfortable when he had sex with a fat woman because she was bigger than him, and so potentially stronger. Although I was already writing fat characters, I had been so immersed in the story of my fatness as weakness, as representing ill health, and as being inherently unlovely that it took the truth-telling of another artist for me to see that men might be committed to dismissive stories about fat female and femme bodies because of a sense of threat from the power inherent in our size. I had never dreamed of using that strength, or even acknowledging that it was there, but having it brought to my attention changed that. I am a fat, 60-year-old lesbian with chronic illness and mobility issues. I am also physically strong. And I know it.

But that's not the big story about fatness. It goes more like this: The fat person (me and maybe you or someone you are at risk of becoming) would be a walking death wish if she weren't too lazy to walk. If she would turn herself over to diets, discipline, and doctors, if she would only start taking care of herself, she could achieve a normal size and a normal life. She shouldn't expect this to be easy – wanting things to be easy is part of why she is fat – but if she dedicates herself to following a few simple rules, she is good. (I heard this most recently from a nurse who was giving me a mandatory weigh-in before knee replacement surgery: “You've been good.” The moral judgment was not medically necessary; it was, in fact, a significant barrier between me and medical care. But it was a familiar part of the story.) Eventually, her body will reflect that goodness by becoming thin. If not, the phrase “morbid obesity” is a judgment, a prediction, and a threat.

There are many wilder, stranger, smarter stories about fatness and gender. Telling such stories means having to fight the tenacious influence of the big story, which tends to mangle and distort any new fat story to get back to familiar, predetermined conclusions. This happens, at least in part, because there are powerful institutions heavily invested in the big story about fatness.

To illustrate what I mean, here is an example from medical research. In “The Obesity Wars and the Education of a Researcher: A Personal Account,” Katherine M. Flegal describes what happened when she (a senior scientist at the Center for

Disease Control and Prevention), a CDC colleague, and two expert statisticians from the National Cancer Institute published an article that found that obesity was associated than fewer deaths relative to normal weight than had been previously predicted, and that overweight was associated with slightly fewer deaths than normal weight. She writes, “We were unprepared for the firestorm that followed” (Flegal 2021, 1). In this case, Flegal notes that they were not actually telling a story but presenting data. She adds, “However, some apparently had trouble grasping this...” (Flegal 2021, 4). The details of the “damage control” (Flegal 2021, 2) her group faced from various other scientists and public health organizations is best read in her article, but for the purposes of considering fatness and story, her seemingly modest conclusion is illuminating: “Scientific findings should be evaluated on their merits, not on the basis of whether they fit a desired narrative” (Flegal 2021, 4). This desired narrative is the big story about fatness.

If well-respected researchers working from within powerful institutions are attacked for simply accurately reporting what the data they analyze reflects about fatness and mortality, how can storytellers hope to be heard? But there are writers with the will and craft to explore themes of fatness and gender in ways that let these things acquire and shed meanings; hum with multiple resonances; and/or create new cognitive, emotional, and cultural spaces in which a broader range of fat, gendered experiences might be lived, shared, and told.

Beginning to tell stories about fatness that run counter to “the desired narrative” can be daunting. Language becomes elusive. In the early eighties, I was a member of the Feminist Alliance/Lesbian Caucus student organization at the University of Colorado. When I was in my senior year, our group received a call for writing about fatness for the anthology that became *Shadow on a Tightrope: Writings by Women on Fat Oppression* (Aunt Lute 1983). I stared at the flyer, fascinated and baffled. I was a fat lesbian. I had been taking fiction and poetry workshops and considered writing to be my vocation. I was also deeply engaged in the feminist project of reclaiming language. For example, I freely used the word “dyke.” But, at that moment, I couldn’t imagine what stories I could possibly tell about fat. I knew that being fat had profoundly shaped my life, but that knowledge evoked experiences of shame, failure, and rejection for me. Having my work published was one of my fiercest ambitions but writing about being fat seemed to risk shutting off my best route out of the cultural stories I was trying to escape. Did I have to bring my stigmatized body with me into my writing life, into the world of my imagination? And wasn’t obsession with weight a trivial concern?

In the end, I didn’t try to write anything for the fat feminist anthology, but my inability to do so haunted me. I graduated and moved from Colorado to Boston. I got a job and tried to figure out how to be a writer. One thing I knew was that meant I had to write, so, when I wasn’t working at a paid job, I did. The first thing I started writing about were experiences of fatness.

The year was 1984, more or less. George Orwell was in the air, and so was Tina Turner. I was sitting on the floor in the basement of New Words, the feminist

bookstore in Cambridge, MA, still a little excited that I had taken the subway to get there. This was a staged reading of Judith Stein's *The Purim Megillah*, a feminist retelling of the Book of Esther. A fat woman read the part of beautiful Queen Esther, who speaks bravely to her husband on behalf of her people. The banished Queen Vashti goes to live with a band of women in the desert.

This was the first time I had ever been to a reading featuring the work of an out lesbian. Judith was fat, too. Not only that, but she had an essay in *Shadow on a Tightrope*, which had come out in June 1983. I was in a fat women's discussion group co-facilitated by her partner, Meridith Lawrence, but I had never met Judith. Most people at the reading were sitting in metal folding chairs. I was in the back. As the staged reading went on, I cried, overwhelmed to see that a writer's fatness could be part of her literary choices. That her work was welcome at this feminist bookstore. And that a roomful of women had come to listen. It is hard to capture in 2021 how strange that was, but it was revelatory. It made me believe that I could write poems, essays, and novels as the fat lesbian I was, and that there would be readers for them.

After the reading, I was invited to go with Judith, Meridith, and others to the S&S restaurant across the street. The restaurant was named for how the great grandmother of the owners would greet her customers in Yiddish: "Es and es." Eat and eat. We were a long table full of fat queers. It was a beautiful, unashamed aria of what to eat, how to make friends (etc.), and, since I wasn't Jewish, how to behave when invited to be part of traditions that were not my own. Judith, radiant, came around the table to greet each one of us. It was a profound experience of abundance, boisterousness, and community.

That is how I came to fatness, gender, and story. Telling the story of the evening is a way to honor this tradition and community. Some of people who participated in it have died. The bookstore is also gone. It was fleeting and simple, a reading and dinner with soon-to-be friends, but the story may evoke this moment for others who were not there, who were perhaps not yet born, but who find themselves engaged with the question of how to tell more varied, stranger, more subtle stories of fatness. This is one way it happened in one specific time, place, and community.

The big story about fatness – and, of course, there is more than one – extends to communities, to entire groups of people. In *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*, Sabrina Strings traces the origin of fat hatred to Enlightenment era efforts among Europeans to develop theories of race and white supremacy. Strings writes, "The image of fat black women as 'savagely' and 'barbarous' in art, philosophy, and science, and as 'diseased' in medicine has been used to both degrade black women and discipline white women" (Strings 2019, 211). She is clear: "In other words, the fear of the black body was integral to the creation of the slender aesthetic among fashionable white Americans" (Strings 2019, 212).

Within the same paragraph, Strings points out that this connection has been neglected by white feminist scholars and historians. This is true, and it extends to storytellers, too. Within my knowledge and memory, everyone at the beloved

table I describe above was white. We were not the same in class, ethnicity, or religion, but we belonged to what Isabel Wilkerson has identified in her book *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* as an upper caste in a violently enforced caste system. I wanted to transform the brutal hierarchies we lived within, and I was learning from others who wanted that, too. We identified our practices, communities, and movement as “fat liberation” with the intention of making explicit connections to other liberation struggles. In the introduction to my first book, *Belly Songs: In Celebration of Fat Women*, Elana Dykewomon wrote:

To have the body of a Jew adds another level to my ambivalence about my body. These imposed body hatreds remind me of Michelle Cliff’s *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me To Despise*, of the intersections of racism and woman-hating. The widespread cultural effects of having so many despised bodies on the landscape are unbelievable (and so, of course, few really take this seriously).

(Dykewomon 1993, i)

I saw this, but my craft and imagination were limited/are limited by my caste. In her unflinching book of literary and cultural criticism, *The Origin of Others*, Toni Morrison writes, “The danger of sympathizing with the stranger is the possibility of becoming a stranger. To lose one’s racial-ized rank is to lose one’s own valued and enshrined difference” (Morrison 2017, 41). The ways that power is distributed and defended in the world make the biases of the upper caste dangerous to everyone. But working within limitations in relation to power and privilege is part of the nature of writing a story.

In *Craft in the Real World: Rethinking Fiction Writing and Workshopping*, Matthew Salesses does a masterful job of challenging accepted models of teaching and talking about story. He describes his overall project like this: “to take craft out of some imaginary vacuum (as if meaning in fiction is separate from meaning in life) and return it to its cultural and historical context” (Salesses 2021, xiii).

In a discussion of the audience, theme, and purpose of a story, he writes:

You are asked to step into the role of the implied reader, and by figuring out the expectations you should read with, you create an image of the implied author. Craft is about how the words on the page do this: what expectations the writer engages with imply whom both the implied reader and implied author are and what they should believe in and care about, what they need explained and/or named, where they should focus their attention, what meaning to draw from the text.

(Salesses 2021, 62)

A story in which both the implied author and reader are fat are rare. Most people who read such a story are spending time in unfamiliar mental territory that they

may not have ever tried to imagine. A person who engages honestly with such a story may be changed by it. Or it might create an experience of thought and reflection that opens the possibility of later change. Salesses writes, “Craft is the history of which kind of stories have typically held power – and for whom – so it is also the history of which stories have typically been omitted” (Salesses 2021, 39). He defines tone as an orientation toward the world (Salesses 2021, 50).

In her essay collection *Wow, No Thank You*, Samantha Irby’s tone is what a *New York Times* review by Parul Sehgal calls “wildly, seditiously funny” (Sehgal 2020). Sehgal writes, “This is her voice: deadpan, confiding, companionable. It can ascend to high silliness ... and then, without any strain, carry us into the darkest rooms in her past” (Sehgal 2020). This tone lets Irby write about poverty, racism, grief, and Crohn’s Disease and also light up all kinds of moments with sentences like, “Sure, sex is fun, but have you ever cut your own hair?” (Irby 2020, 132). This is part of a long incantation in an essay called “Lesbian Bed Death.” It reminds me of Gertrude Stein’s great poem, “Lifting Belly.” Irby’s tone is an orientation toward the world, for sure, one that took me (and a lot of other people; the book is a bestseller) to the hardest places gasping with laughter instead of terror.

In “Season 1, Episode 1,” Irby describes pitching her first book as a television series. Her list of themes includes inflammatory bowel disease. She writes,

I don’t treat my Crohn’s like it’s an albatross around my neck, like I’m laboring under the weight of this oppressive disease.... It’s a serious topic that can be dealt with in a really funny way while also repping for the chronically ill and constantly medicated, like me.

(Irby 2020, 226–227)

Irby is explicit that the implied audience for the work includes the “chronically ill and constantly medicated” (Irby 2020, 227). This contrasts with some early writing around fatness in which some authors sought to establish that fatness is not unhealthy. Here, chronic illness and its discontents are fully present. I experience the wit and explicitness about both bodily functions and messy feelings as a relief.

Another theme in the television pitch comes under the heading, “fat people doing fat shit without crying big fat tears about it” (Irby 2020, 228). As a fat reader who has long found most stories about fat characters presented in popular culture to be profoundly unsatisfying and barely related to actual human beings, the tone of Irby’s description of this theme makes me feel released, welcomed, and fought for. (*This Is Us*, mentioned below, is a popular television drama that ran for six seasons.)

I can’t watch *This Is Us* because even though the brothers are hot and the dad is a smoke show, in the first couple episodes the fat girl doesn’t get to be much more than “fat,” and wow, no thank you! Maybe there are fat people sitting

around silently weeping about being fat every minute of every day, but that is a redemptive arc thin people like to see on television, and it's just not the fucking truth.

*(Irby 2020, 228)*

Irby could not be clearer that she has stakes in how stories about fat people are told, and that she wants her stories to be different. She moves in her work from performance to essays to stories that became images on television, then back to essays. Amid her pitch about fat themes in her work, she writes, "... sometimes I hate my body not because it's fat, but mostly because I never wake up in the morning to discover it had transformed into a wolf or a shark overnight" (Irby 2020, 228). This wish to cross species is more rewarding to ponder or attempt to embody than the crying of big fat tears. In "Girls Gone Mild," Irby's account of taking up partying again in her late thirties, suddenly her vision sharpens, she can smell every bead of sweat in the club. Then, "I hear the seams of my shirt ripping as my chest broadens, tufts of coarse hair forcing their way out of the collar from of my shirt. I bolt from my seat as I feel my claws split my shoes open" (Irby 2020, 33). The character of Irby in this essay is a werewolf until – "muzzle retracting and haunches reverting to their gelatinous state" (Irby 2020, 33) – she gets home to take a shower and eat chips. It's funny and shocking. In this essay, the character changes dramatically, physically, beyond the rules of bodies as we know them. In the collection as a whole, the world changes to become a place in which Irby's voice shapes popular culture. That change is not fiction, but it is built on story.

In Elizabeth McCracken's dark fairy tale, "Birdsong from the Radio," Leonora is a mother who becomes a monster, many monsters. As with most fairy tales, the heart of it is in the telling. It is a gradual transformation from a story of family life – a mother telling stories, nuzzling her children's necks, taking bites; three children laughing, "Rosa, Marco, Dolly plump loaves of bread, delicious;" (McCracken 2021, 108) a father busy making radios – to layers on layers of loss. As the children get bigger, Leonora bites, demanding love. Once thin, she thickens. "She had gone mad, or was going" (McCracken 2021, 110). She keeps trying to eat her children, who huddle together in the same bed, afraid.

So she had to sneak. The weight of her as she sat on the edge of their beds in the middle of the night was raptorial: ominous yet indistinct. At any moment, the children thought, she might spread her arms and pull them from the sheets through the ceiling and into the sky, the better to harm them elsewhere.

*(McCracken 2021, 110)*

The weight was raptorial. She is getting fatter, yet she might fly, carrying them to harm. The children decide that they must leave to save themselves. They tell their father, who understands nothing. He takes them to a new house and hires "a nanny, Madeleine, a jug-eared, freckled beauty. A good girl, as her father later



described her to the news cameras” (McCracken 2021, 111). The day after her twenty-first birthday, still drunk, she crashed her car on ice after she picks up the children from school. All of them die.

“‘No children,’ thought Leonora. She had intended to get herself upright and go looking for them. She should have eaten them when she could” (McCracken 2021, 112).

Now, the story – which has been spent time with the children at a seemingly distance and is in Madeleine’s thoughts as she dies – stays close to Leonora as she grieves beyond the boundaries of what human society can tolerate. Able to bear it or not is not a question for Leonora. She is too deeply in it. It is of her. She hears the voices of her children on the many family radios. Then the voices of her children are gone, leaving a feral burble she still hears after she turns the radios off.

Things get even more agonizing and extraordinary:

She felt her torso, where her children would have been, had she managed to eat them.

Not everyone who stops being human turns animal, but Leonora did.

It was time to leave the house. The top of her back grew humped with ursine fat, and she shambled like that, too, bearlike through the aisles of the grocery at the end of the street. She shouldered the upright fridges full of beer; she sniffed the air of the checkout lanes. Panda-eyed and eagle-toed and lion-tailed, with a long braid down her back that snapped as though with muscles and vertebrae. Her insides, too. Animals of the dark and deep. Her kidneys dozing moles; her lungs, folded bats. The organs that had authored her children: jellyfish, jellyfish, eel, eel, manatee.

I am dead. I am operated by animals.

Her wandering took her to the bakery.

*(McCracken 2021, 113)*

This is a fat person deep in grief, but she is far from crying big fat tears about being fat. Instead, her fatness marks her wildness, her animal self – selves! – the voraciousness of both her love and her grief. She begins to frequent the bakery, where she sees the shapes of her children in the challah. She cradles the loaf, then she eats it, every morning. It is a discomfiting act of communion, bread transfigured into beloved flesh. When other mothers of the neighborhood look at her tearing into challah in the bakery, “Leonora could see the rictus of judgment on the mother’s face” (McCracken 2021, 115). I am not Leonora and can only nod to her inner beasts, but I have known the rictus of judgment on the faces of many strangers if they should happen to catch sight of me in the fat body I have, let alone see me eating. Having the phrase “the rictus of judgment” allows language for a lifetime of stiffened and stiffening encounters. Leonora is experiencing so much more than this. Still, the phrase is a feast in a realm of experiences for which I am starved for precise and nuanced words.

Five years pass. Leonora – “poisoned, padded, eyes sunk in her face” (McCracken 2021, 116) – is a monument while the deaths of her children are forgotten. Then a man approaches her in the bakery. It is the father of Madeleine, the nanny, come to try to redeem Leonora. The animals in her body roar back to life. She remembers sitting at the back of the church at the funeral for the children: “Nobody spoke to her. She was a mother who’d let her children go, a creature so awful nobody believed in her. She’d had to turn herself into a monster in order to be seen” (McCracken 2021, 118).

Madeleine’s father has a dead child, too. Leonora feels his sorrow and guilt “like schools of tiny flicking fish who swim through bone instead of ocean. He was not entirely human anymore either. Indeed, she could hear the barking dog of his heart, wanting an answer. Her heart snarled back, but tentatively” (McCracken 2021, 118).

There is nothing more urgent and riveting than Leonora’s feelings in this moment. Her organs are turning in their burrows. “She was thankful to remember that she was a monster. Many monsters. Not a chimera but a vivarium. Her heart snarled, and snarled, and snarled” (McCracken 2021, 119). A vivarium is an enclosure, container or structure adapted or prepared for keeping animals under seminatural conditions for observation or study or as pets. Leonora might do anything.

What she does is offer to buy him a challah. In the last line of the story, she says, “It will be a pleasure to watch you eat” (McCracken 2021, 119). Leonora’s pleasure was the last thing I expected to emerge from this moment. The same is true of her thankfulness. These feelings are still burrowing in me as I read and reread the story.

“Eight Bites” by Carmen Maria Machado is also a fairy tale of family, loss, and a kind of haunting that becomes something much bigger. In it, the despised and discarded fat of a woman’s body becomes a ghost, a monster, a daughter, something “mothersoft,” and an immortal being.

It takes place in a family of women: sisters, mothers, daughters. A woman living on Cape Cod has learned from mother, who is now dead, that eight bites is all she needs to eat at any meal. She tries this but chooses to follow her three sisters into bariatric surgery. Her sisters help her. Her daughter, over the phone, objects. The surgery works. She gets smaller. She can eat just eight bites: “Before, I would have been growling, climbing up the walls from want. Now I feel only slightly empty, and fully content” (Machado 2017, 161).

But she wakes with something small standing over her. At first, she thinks that this is her daughter as a child, but she realizes it can’t be her. It has a person-shaped outline, with weight when it sits on her bed. Most of the time, though it hides, breathing audibly, making things creak. When she asks her sisters if they’d felt a presence “after,” they all have. One speaks of her joy, another her inner beauty, another her former shame. When she finally finds the being in the basement, it’s body-shaped, dripping, and looks like her daughter. Closer, “it smells warm, like

toast” (Machado 2017, 165). As the woman gets closer, she is moved to rejection, then violence:

I kneel down next to it. It is a body with nothing it needs: no stomach or bones or mouth. Just soft indents. I crouch down and stroke its shoulder, or what I think is its shoulder.

It turns and looks at me. It has no eyes, but still, it looks at me. She looks at me. She is awful but honest. She is grotesque but she is real.

I shake my head. “I don’t know why I wanted to meet you,” I say. “I should have known.”

She curls a little tighter. I lean down and whisper where an ear might be.

“You are unwanted,” I say. A tremor ripples her mass.

I do not know I am kicking her until I am kicking her. She has nothing and I feel nothing except she seems to solidify before my foot meets her, so every kick is more satisfying than the last. I reach for a broom and I pull a muscle swinging back and in and back and in, and the handle breaks off in her and I kneel down and pull soft handfuls of her body out of herself, and I throw them against the wall, and I do not know I am screaming until I stop, finally.

I find myself wishing she would fight back, but she doesn’t. Instead, she sounds like she is being deflated. A hissing, defeated wheeze.

*(Machado 2017, 165)*

She walks away and goes on to live life as a new woman. Sometimes, she can still hear this unloved being in the house. The story moves into future tense as she describes the last time she sees the being, which will be the day of her death. She will wake, anticipating a visit from her daughter and granddaughter, feeling a great pressure on her chest. “Arms will lift me from my bed – her arms. They will be mother-soft, like dough and moss” (Machado 2017, 167). The woman will start to ask a question, then realize that she knows this:

by loving me when I did not love her, by being abandoned by me, she has become immortal. She will outlive me by a hundred million years; more, even. She will outlive my daughter, and my daughter’s daughter, and the earth will teem with her and her kind, their inscrutable forms and unknowable destinies.

*(Machado 2017, 167)*

The body – the soft, indented, fat life force – will bear her away like an angel of death or a god as the woman whispers apologies. These are well-deserved apologies, although most likely irrelevant to the inscrutable, immortal being – one of many – that her rejected and attacked fatness has become. These immortal beings will inherit the earth in ways that those who have tried to control their bodies through manipulations and deprivations in service to gendered cultural

imperatives cannot begin to understand. Still, there is connection between the woman and her rejected fatness that lasts for her entire human lifetime. Even she will see it and be sorry in the end as the being made by her rejection – this organless body – will gently and without accusation help her leave her life when the time for her death comes.

On the previous page, the woman in “Eight Bites,” narrating beach summers as a new woman, says, “If you’re brave, you’ll turn your body over to this water that is practically an animal, and so much larger than yourself” (Machado 2017, 166). Samantha Irby, Elizabeth McCracken, and Carmen Maria Machado have all written stories and essays that risk turning the imagination over to fatness in ways that enter water that might be an animal or many animals, but, for all its salt, is something much bigger and wilder than big fat tears. Reading them and engaging with the monsters in this work is like the moment I first understood that physical strength could come with my fatness, when I understood that strength could be a kind of power that looked nothing like what I had been trained to recognize or desire. Fatness, monsters, and power are not containable, simple, or pretty. These stories about them by Irby, McCracken and Machado are nothing like the neat insistence of the big story about fatness, the big lie.

I write about these stories in the bathtub, with a wooden tray resting on the edges to hold my notebook. This tray has slats like a bridge. The water is like skin with my body beneath. Air is the skin of the world with water, bodies, trees, screens, and thyme within. A story is a wave. It’s a rustle in the wind. It’s the fat of my belly rising under the water, falling to rest on my thighs. A story is a fat, middle-aged woman who may become a beast. Deeply imagined stories of fatness and gender fill out the body of the world.

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