Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Kelsey Bryan-Zwick: Three Poems

Kelsey Bryan-Zwick · Thursday, February 17th, 2022

Left Thigh

I'm trying to convince my Left Thigh to flex, to push past
the numbness and infuse feeling into the flesh,
but Left Thigh is having none of it. The prolonged
concentration beading sweat on my brow, and still the action
is only murmurs of fizzles out.

Yes, Left Thigh hardly yawns or blinks, ignores both heat and ice
the deep cat scratches accumulate—my own hands become a stranger,
hot tears and anger stream down my face as I grasp at straws.

Imagine Left Thigh, you are not—not made of tissue, tendons, and sinew.
Let the marrow in your bone melt, imagine you are composed instead
of fistfuls of flowers blooming today's begonias.

And like a dreaming dog, Left Thigh twitches—
like a child suddenly paying attention.

And so, I raise my voice up again. Everyday a new story: this one goes
you are made of gingko leaves yellow fanning, a rustle in November's
wind, and Left Thigh flies a kite.

I say Left Thigh you are not, have no legs at all, rather
a mermaid's glossy tail, rhinestone bright beneath the water,
and Left Thigh swims.

Soon, Left Thigh exhibits magical powers, says to me today is not
a cold day, wind pricking up goosepimpled skin. No, Left Thigh is warm,
feels a wind cloudy with pollen, late in the spring. The twist of birds,
Kingfisher snatching at the air. Left Thigh wears these costumes
like a skin beneath the skin.

Now Left Thigh can go out dancing, the night made of sequins and velvet,
just the right amount of glitz. Left Thigh twirls and steps, never tires
though the rest of me slinks back, exhausted.

The memory of what Left Thigh was before may blip
faint cry of homing beacon lighthousing through space,
but under the pool of numbness, Left Thigh becomes all of their desires:
flower, yellow fanning, twist of birds, a true shapeshifting sophisticate.

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Scoliosis

Unplugging the bathtub drain with my curved toes
numb, where I cannot bend to reach, learning this and
to have self-esteem, even with legs unshaved, toenails
grown long, hair unwashed, wound crusting over, blood
in my mouth from intubation, back of the throat scratch
letting the cup half-full, fall and shatter with stunted reflex,
letting someone else to tidy the jagged edges—as I contend
with mending my own, placing the odds on myself, even
as the doctors explain the risks, explain the need—to once
again sharpen their knives.

*

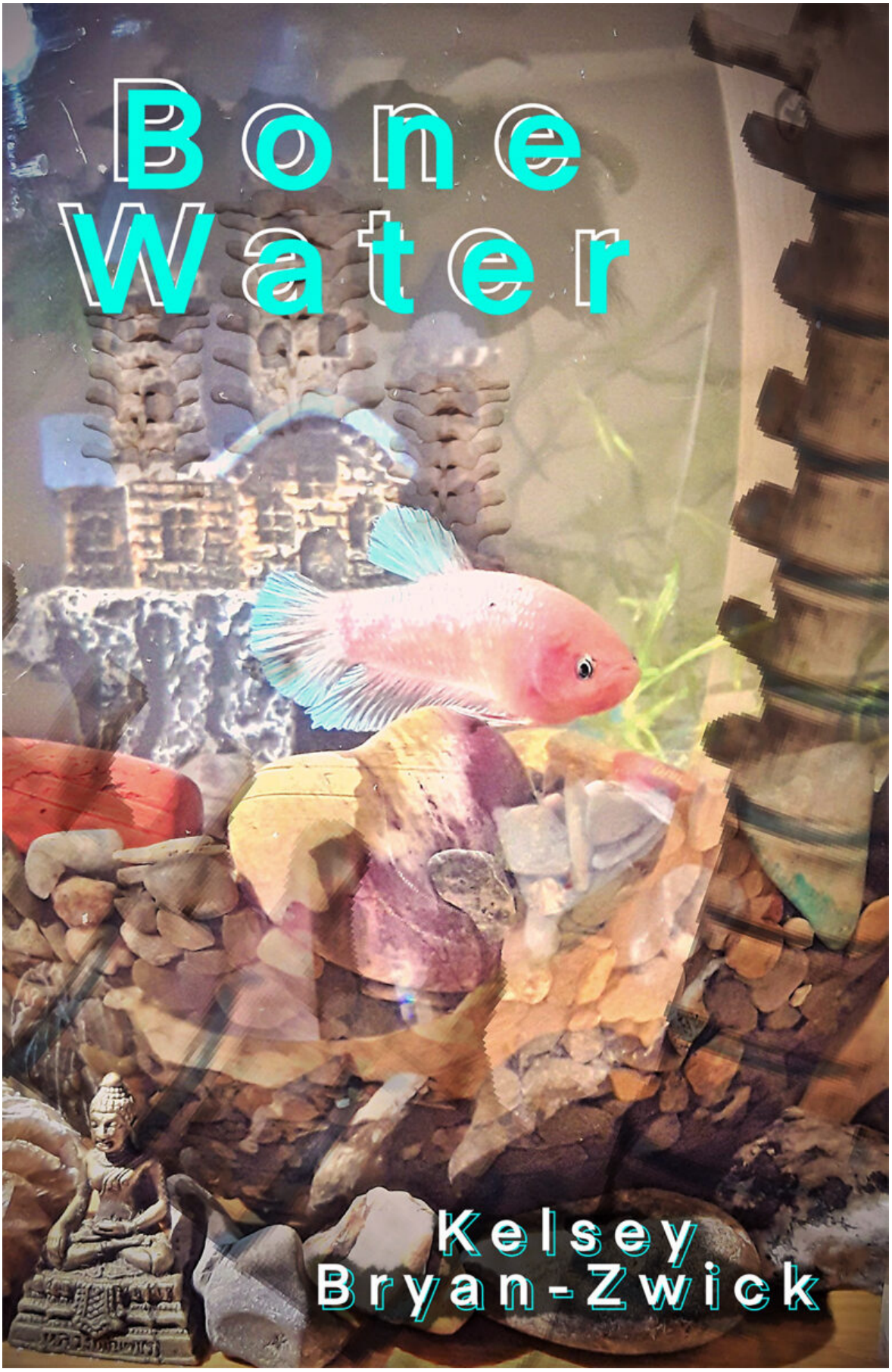
New Love

My scar; long divide down the spine,
explicit trauma on display,
bathing suit exposing, or tank top revealing
where sutures have been.

My scar, now multiple surgeries deep,
marks the path I walk, the miles
to go before I sleep, the hours
I’ve had to cry, sweat, bleed, beg
this life for another chance.

This scar: the only way I know how to love
all those who trust me, have given me
blood, cadaver bone, seat, tears.

Let this scar show all there is to tell,
an openly worn story, my brutality clear,
my beauty: not the face that launched
a thousand ships, but the heart that takes
a thousand arrows.



Book cover for BONE WATER by Kelsey Bryan-Zwick

To buy the book BONE WATER by Kelsey Bryan-Zwick, click here

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