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I've Carried an Elephant

Last night my son said he'll run away
& find his birth mama.

What of selfishness

can I speak?—the way I wanted desperately
to become a mother & believed the burden
was mine.

There is a forest in the desert, edging
a shallow brown river. I've found
an elephant in the water where no

elephant should belong.

I've held a child

in the place of an elephant,
or the elephant became a child

& I held him for longing—

I'm sorry his father screams at him.

If I were braver

I would ashen the sky with fire.

I believed the burden
was mine & the elephant carries me
across the water

when the monsoons come & the river turns.

There is a depth in the forest,
a bank of sand in the depth.
The boy dreams

a heaven into a state
he calls another country
pinpointed on the map of his heart's bluest walls

surrounded by lakes & the greenest forests—
Can you imagine a forest greener
than your own? Does it hurt to imagine?

Once I found a house of sticks
of cottonwood velvet
stacked toward sky like a pyramid—

the smoke from the chimney never
burnt the house & inside lived a family made of mud
who never washed away

even when the rains came.

One day the house submerged but the smoke
continued.

I watched from the back
of my elephant.

Last night my son came downstairs
because he heard me crying.
He held onto me & his words held onto me.

Sometimes I carry the elephant when it grows
tired. Sometimes the smoke greys the sky for days.

Sometimes the rains leave everything unchanged,
mud grows dry, grows thick—

Sometimes
the elephant promises he will never leave.

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