

Carl Blechen, 'Stormy sea with Lighthouse', c.1826.



# Black Lullaby

Christie Maurer

**T**he drunk sea thrashes  
the black-toothed cliff side, eternal  
child pitching a fit, it gathers its flowing  
skirts once more to throw itself  
on daggers. I know people like this, tireless,  
who favour the floor's backhand  
to their glued-together shatterings.  
I feel a splintering, the metallics  
of blood in my mouth, hair-line crack  
at my heel, precious fault  
snaking up the leg again. I hang my skin  
on the tree's blue limb and sit in the sand.  
It blows and snaps – a sheet set to dry.  
Exquisite – veins twist  
red over blue – tapestry.  
I stare unflinchingly, lidless,  
at the high windows the wind whistles.  
My forgotten sister lives there,  
combing her hair, gliding room to room.  
Her lily-long fingers touch  
every small object. She's waited,  
patient for a visit. Like a needle,  
the seascape pierces  
her eyes and fills her with longing  
for its glass edge, while the sea spreads  
its waters searching for something to hold.

.....  
**Christie Maurer**

'What did she find there but real ripe strawberries',  
Arthur Rackham's illustration to the Brothers Grimm,  
'The three little men in the wood' (1917).



# Winter Strawberries, a Song for Unwanted Children

Christie Maurer

## 1.

There, on her lips, the taste for it.  
She imagines her mouth  
on the tip of something sweet.

Mother made me  
in twilight with a man  
who rinsed her body  
and held it on his tongue like cake.

Her body is  
white communion.

Let snow bathe us! Let us imagine  
our mouths on the tip of something sweet.

## 2.

All morning at the window, she sits.  
The back of her head framed by hoarfrost.

I imagine her eyes, dark and searching  
for something she wants under the snow.

With eyes deepened from staring, mother turns back at me.  
As if I were an illness, she studies me.

The fire crackles in its sooty pit.  
I hear her latch the door from outside.

3.

Strawberries don't grow in winter, I know

but mother made me  
this paper dress, said go

fetch me a basket of strawberries.

By the fire she sits, counting her flames,  
like the gold coins she keeps in her purse.

I lie in her great hand like a coin to be spent.

Something in us that will lie in a hand.  
Something in a heart is glad to kill.  
Something sweet.

4.

None of them invite  
me inside beside  
their fires  
though they can  
see my feet  
are turning blue,  
see my breath  
freeze and fall  
like my paper dress  
will. Soon,  
I am naked.  
So what,  
let them stare.  
I will break  
all their windows.

5.

Into a whiteness that obliterates, I enter  
the mind laid bare.

I will spare you my hunger; my handfuls of snow.

6.

Mother bathes in milk and drinks wine  
my hands make a cup, my mouth is dry

waiting for someone to love me.

7.

When I found myself I found a cove of melting snow  
and within the cove a briar; densely knotted

thick with thorn, and within the briar  
a patch of kindness: wild strawberries –

startling, red, dripping, wet,

like the Christ Child inside the flaming heart.

8.

In the eaves the swallows sing sweetly  
a song for children lost in the woods.

I imagine my mouth. Mother  
in a bath of lit coals—

I imagine cruel mothers in us all.



**Christie Maurer**