

Poets

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For a Young Giant

At three, you stood taller than your father's elbow
and lisped, your tongue too big for speech. He
drew a ring around your bed, but could not know
when a blue norn slid close one night, a harpy
with a broken wing, a sprite with a rasp like a crow
and a boon your family never saw until you grew.
Her palm charred by flame, she stroked your cheek:
a frost flower, asleep in the bed of your genes,
bloomed under her hand. *Big luck*, she said. *Grow*.

Or else, you were born beneath Odin's great tree.
Your first cry brought a thunder of legs that strode
land and water, struck fiords, mute arms of the sea.
Taller than tall, the members of your tribe breathed
a fog of sleep over the world, etched their odes
and claims onto tree trunks, between rocks, beneath
the ears of the gods. At sixteen, in a shoe store, you roll
up your pant cuff and the salesman gasps before he
slips into the back room, babbling he doesn't know

if the store carries, or has ever carried, your size.
No one does. He measures, not trusting his eyes,
uses a yardstick and pauses before he begs to make
a cast of your foot in plaster, a proof-positive prize
to hang outside the store beside a sign that wheezes
Big Foot shops here. You won't believe your eyes.
You dip your toes into the white goo and realize
tomorrow he'll be deep in the hyperbole of freak
saying *Hands the size of dogs, head a side of beef,*

arms like eels. Exaggeration reinvents you as meat.
When you are seven foot three, your bones cannot knit,
but creak and break like glass rods, and your feet
are numb most days, so there'll be no jump, no pivot,
no stuffing the basket. Your height makes you no athlete,
but a walking rime of acumen and ice. Your only heat
springs from the well of knowledge; you paid a fit
price to the ogre, a kidney and half your tongue for one
long draught from his horn. How else to live this petite

farce and keep smiling, keep saying *the weather's fine,*
sir, ma'am, thanks for asking? Keep counsel in the bleak
cavern of your bending body. For each long Northern night
Loki's wolf growls at your side, fetter him close and tight
with this formula, an ancient rite: the third pad of a cat's paw,
a woman's beard, bear sinew, fish breath, a bird's bright
spittle. Rope him down and sleep the sleep of Gargantua.
Keep the world intact with your gift from that ashen crone,
your big luck, our lodestone. Tonight Ragnorak is postponed