

BENJAMIN S. GROSSBERG

MY OCTOPUS LOVER IS EASY TO TALK TO

The bubbles of my words amuse him.
He pokes them with a forward tentacle
as they rise from my mouth. Bigger
bubbles for longer words. I can feel
and see rather than hear his giggling.
See: yes. A tittering of the body,
a gelatinous shake which assures me
he still likes me. The fact that he did
five minutes ago has no purchase
on my imagination. When I sing
the bubbles come out long and thin,
and he grabs them with two or three
tentacles and twists them into
balloon-animal shapes to give back
to me: a little dog in my outstretched
hand when I sang him Donovan's
"Atlantis." It slowly rose to the surface,
lifting from my palm to the waves.
How to explain to him that words
and sex are the only (or the best)
means at my disposal, and their
painful inadequacy? But what bliss
that I don't have to. It's merely
my breath and the shapes it takes
that he wants, and when his mouth
is on mine, also, perhaps, the heat
I communicate directly—body to
skin, skin to body—in this ocean-cold.

THE CHILDHOOD OF AN OCTOPUS LOVER

In the 1980s sitcom of my life,
my folks sit across from me.
You've been acting weird lately,
champ. I hang my head.
We just want the best for you,
honey. I work up nerve.
(Slowly.) Then, eyes down
to the rug, I mumble: *octopus*—
inaudible—as sister bursts in,
muddy in her softball digs,
smacking a fist into her mitt.
Boy we sure showed them!
She narrates the game;
I slink upstairs. By the end
of the episode, it's all okay:
my folks and I sit on the dock,
legs dangling. I point
to the water. Dad says
we love you no matter what.
Next season, there's a shot
of me by my locker, chatting
with an octopus. For the series
finale? Rumors of a kiss.
In real life, I sit on the couch
beside mom and brothers
watching a show in which
some kid adopts a pet squid.
My brothers groan. I'm silent,
103 mind racing, eyes forward,
desperate not to glance around.
Will they read it on my face?
Me me the show's about me.