

## I Dream of a Two-Headed Snake

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### Poem by Robin Chapman



### I Dream of a Two-Headed Snake

Wake to ask, what image has surfaced  
this python from what archetypal ark?

Each head the head of a Siberian polar bear  
striking first left, then right—then everywhere

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on the dry-baked grid, fanged heads  
poke up from their chessboard holes,

our task to chase each back to its lair  
though nowhere is there a sign of ice

and we race, a tribe of girls, to save ourselves  
and our world, though when I look up

*two-headed snake* in the dictionary  
I find *Amphisbaena alba*, a white worm lizard

resistant to bites whose camouflaged tail  
improves the odds of its survival by fifty percent

and then I find one in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*  
musing on what odious monster I shall call her

speaking of Clytemnestra, a woman  
who has slain a man—poison from both mouths—

and another Greek tale of the two-headed snakes  
spawned from the blood that dripped

from Medusa's head of hair as Perseus flew  
with it over the Libyan desert,

snakes feeding on the corpses left by Cato's army—  
or the Aztec's image of a double-headed serpent

made of turquoise, maybe a gift from Moctezuma  
to Cortés, symbol of rebirth, earth and underworld

housed in the British Museum, and it's true,  
in my dream, the scene suddenly switched

to a group of women telling Kundalini stories,  
that energy that snakes up the spine.

Meanwhile, all those polar bears sank in the sands  
of the Libyan desert, drowning in all that heat—

and now I dream I'm trying to find my husband  
to tell him to come see the plays that young girls

have rewritten after Aeschylus—this time  
the babies will not be dashed against the wall.

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Robin Chapman's tenth book, *The Only Home We Know*, was published this spring from Tebot Bach. She is the recipient of *Appalachia's* 2010 Poetry Prize, the *Cider Press Review* Editor's Prize Book Award, two Wisconsin Library Association awards, and the Posner Poetry Award for previous collections. Most recently, *Six True Things*, poems of growing up in the Atomic City of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, received the Wisconsin Library Association's Outstanding Achievement in Poetry Award. Her poems have appeared in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Ascent*, and *Valparaiso Poetry Review*.

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