

True Stories by Margaret Atwood

Don't ask for the true story;
why do you need it?

It's not what I set out with,
or what I carry.

What I'm sailing with,
a knife, blue fire,
luck, a few good words that still work
and the tide.

The true story was lost
on the way down to the beach;
it's something I never had,
that black tangle of branches in a shifting light,
my blurred footprints filling with salt water,

this handful of tiny bones, this owl's kill.
a moon, crumpled papers, a coin,
the glint of an old picnic,
the hollows made by lovers in the sand
a hundred years ago: no clue

The true story lies among the other stories;
a mess of colors, like jumbled clothing,
thrown off or away,

like hearts on marble, like syllables
like butchers' discards.

The true story is vicious
and multiple. and untrue
after all.

Why do you need it?
Don't ever ask for the true story.