

Five Water-Related Poems

The Hatch

Evening, done fishing, I lay rod and self
beside the river, observe the subtle
surface eruptions, the slow unfolding
of wings, lifting into tenuous flight,
or the sip, the sucking under, of a creature
so delicate, it's called Ephemerella.

The current wipes the slate clean,
carries the dimples, death's memory,
downstream.
Before me, more flies emerge,
as if to say, *Death moves on.*
Life stays in place.

Then the hatch ends.
The stream's glassy surface,
impervious as black marble,
moves like a solid slab towards the valley floor,
mirrors the darkening sky,
which soon closes like a cellar door.

Hal

Though electroshock eased your pain
it erased our evening's fishing.
I wish I'd worked harder
to restore that night
to your whitewashed brain,

starting with the plump, pumpkin moon
that pulled the tide nearly into your yard
where striped bass grazed
a pasture of aquatic grass for crabs,
our skiff rising and falling
with the Chesapeake's breath.

The honor of your excitement
magnified our catch, its size, the moon
and tide to monuments in my eyes.

You, cousin, mentor and friend,
serious commercial fisherman,
who that very morning waded ankle deep
in bunkers, bluefish, spot and speckled trout,
now as excited as I by individual fish.
Surely even the fish were honored.

Months later, when I tried to reminisce,
and that night went missing, I was angry,
first, in my youthful foolishness, at you,
then at those who, meaning well, broke
into your mind and burglarized us both.

Your blank eyes deflated the moon.
lowered the tide, left me flailing
the exhausted water alone,
your illness lurking in the darkness,
mine as yet unknown.

How were we to know
the evening's real blessing,
was neither moon, nor tide, nor fish,
but our very own obliviousness?

Immersion

A trout stream's deceptive beauty sometimes
makes falling in seem appealing—
floating silently, weightlessly among
cathedral columns of blue-tinted light

But when I fell in, there was nothing
spiritual about it. I only wanted out.
I realized, *Oneness with Nature*
was a figure of speech or a death wish.

Now the stream seemed more human-trap
than holy place: gnarled, boot-grabbing roots,
dark swirling eddies. I scrambled to shore
like a clumsy beaver, lay in the sun, gasping for air,

and wondered, did the trout connect my rude,
roof-crashing entry with the fanged,
phony insects, that tore lips
and yanked fish towards the fatal light?

This whole angling business—part love-affair,
part war—life or death for trout, now
mostly pageantry for me, a re-enactment
of a past, when fish were necessary food.

My need to pursue outlived its usefulness,
more done to me than my own doing.
I never asked for these desires. They were passed
to me by generations of commercial fishermen.

The needs endured, like orphans, seeking friends,
finding trout. An apology seemed in order,
but how do you apologize to flowing water,
when that which you are sorry for is already far away?

From Her Bedroom Window

She heard waves lick the beach
like a cat lapping a bowl of milk,
soon to feast on Mud and Oyster Creeks,
then trees and fields. Unafraid,

she didn't resist, but submitted.
She loved that body of water
as another might love a man
or woman or cherished pet.

In storms, the Bay slung the beach around
as if playing with a yarn strand.
Wherever the sand came to rest, she walked
in solitude and wonder, but never sorrow.

For she found arrowheads, pottery shards
From hundreds and thousands of years ago,
and in one deep ditch, fossilized shark teeth,
millions of years old.

The fantasy of permanence
was not permitted on her property.
No barriers to the waves advance,
no rip-rap, seawalls or revetments.

And when the Chesapeake
finally wandered up to her old home place,
she'd ruffle its fur, scratch its belly
and offer nourishment.

St. George's Lake, Copenhagen

Two seagulls settle as delicately as teacups
onto the lake's green tablecloth.
A light breeze fingers the willow leaves.

A rectangular lake, cut to fit a cityscape,
fringed by gravel and asphalt path,
metal benches, a granite patio of people.

An inner layer of ducks, gulls and wading birds,
but no fish in sight. Unlikely, though,
that herons place faith in a barren lake.

That's a human trait:
St. George gave his life for Jesus.
In retrospect, was that really necessary?

John said, *In the beginning was the Word.*
If only he had stopped there,
left well enough alone,

But he couldn't keep his mouth shut.
Some call it *Good News*.
That's a matter of opinion.

While gulls and breeze seed language,
the lake's silence speaks volumes.
But, like the herons, I have all day,
I'll wait.