

Our Lady of the Lake

I stand at the brink of your vastness, letting the ripples lap my toes,
going deeper until numbness licks my calves.

Lights of a great cargo ship wink on your face, so far away I cannot hear the crew as they chatter over dinner.

Steaming bowls of whitefish soup, watered down coffee, calls to spouses, children, brothers, parents.
Joking about the monsters below.

So far that the lone mariner leaning on the rail in the still of night cannot see me, nor I him.

I, no more than a shade on the shore.

And he, just a twinkle on the water.

Perhaps he's praying too.

Can you take this from me? I implore.

Can I pour my burdens into your black wet? Watch as they seep from my toenails and slide over thousands of smooth pebbles to your deep?

You answer in small waves pushing at my legs, and as each
recedes I urge it to pull more blight from my body,
to drain me of the brackish mud that bubbles in the back of my throat
until I am reborn, shivering, in a clean, clear pool of you.

Dear Lady, I know I'm not the first (nor last) to drop my sorrows in your depths.

Countless others throw their troubles to you, like the stones children skip from your shores.

And you, Shining Woman, take them all.

You hold them forever in your icy womb, where the dead and the sturgeon sleep.

Snow

Beyond the window, snow dips and winds its way to Earth.

Millions of miniature miracles pile atop one another
to become one continuous thing.

Quietly, gently covering everything until all around is silent crystalline beauty.

Inside, my children huddle in a jumble of blankets, pillows, couch cushions.

Three impossibly perfect girls
in mismatched pajamas and hair in tangled nests
from last night's sleep.

The centerpiece of this lovely mess.

In a rare moment of stillness, they tell each other stories.

The oldest spinning sweet tales of magic,
her younger sisters adding bits of nonsense in sugary voices.

I watch them touch each other the way I touch them—
hair brushed from eyes, a hand cupping a cheek.

Small echoes of the best in me.

My heart tightens with the exquisite pain of loving my babies;
an awesome, clenching ache.

I want to wrap this up,
carefully curl soft cotton and blue paper around its edges.

Keep it somewhere safe.

But I remain frozen,
unwilling to break this spell,
the way you'd hold your breath
to save a snowflake from melting.

Ten

I pick up pieces of you everywhere.
Broken bits like breadcrumbs left along my path,
hoping I'll find you whole again.

I carry them with me always,
like stones saved in my pocket;
small treasures I share with no one,
finding comfort in their weight.

Some so smooth they're almost soft—
warm and dark and round.
The sound of your name said in stories.
I savor it like candy melting in my mouth.

Some stinging, sharp, shocking.
A wedding band like yours winking at me from a shop keeper's hand.
I have to stop myself from weeping in his arms.

Some are so bright and surprising they drop on me like liquid gold.
An old newspaper box selling your paper hundreds of miles from our sainted city.
I stand in the sunshine and laugh out loud.

And then.
Then there are some so heavy my body shakes with effort.
My babies smiling your smile at me, their eyes aglow with mischief.
I lose my breath and freeze. You're almost fully there.

And so this hole your leaving left
is filled with what I find.
But my search for you will never end,
my eyes will scour this earth for you,
and my arms will always lift you up.
I'll carry you for us both.

Refinishing

The stars have blinked off to their blue sleep
and I continue working.

I have found comfort in stripping this old door.

There's something intimate
in the way it lets me take its layers
clean down to the soft pink pine.

I will admit there are certain spots

I have to scrape harder
to coax the old color away;

certain angles
my sweet sandpaper song must calm.

But in the end
it lays itself out unashamed.

I envy it,
this door with a second chance at life.
Starting over new and untainted,
clothed only in a silky spread of dust.