

KEEP EVERYTHING

Wolf Bone Reliquaries

for Stephen Berg

We were never on the same page

except all those times we were.

Since the dawn of writing

we were written: a stylus wedging

sacred incantations

into that first mound of moist clay;

("We were Egypt," you whispered, "we were bedrock");

We were Aramaic-stained papyrus scrolls

hidden in desert caves from Love's Infidels, until....

Our bodies interlaced like fiery letters

razed from the Book of Kells.

If there was Holy Ground

we walked a burning lifetime

just to touch hands, lips—

Like this sunset

folding into waves:

a Holy Vow set ablaze.

I can proclaim it now:

At this oceanside bar at
the torn edge of America,
I can finally confess our love aloud:

It was always only you.

Mysteries remain:

How you unhinged my heart
of wolf bone reliquaries
buried in a snow-locked, birch-bound forest;
how I touched your soul of river willow
and stayed, roped in pale green leaves;
how we found each other on this planet:

This wildly spinning typewriter ball flinging out poetry and ink-black stars

lighting the last candles in the final windows of our lives:

How did we find each other?

Me, clockwise; you, widdershins. Me:

racing through airports, or drifting at 40-thousand-feet
above Asia, over the Pacific, touching down just long enough to find

You: always pacing the same route on the same city streets, until
only your footprints remained.

The waiter offers me another drink,
and I take it, since this Earth has become
for me mere outpost.

I watch the gleaming yachts
splashed with the sun's flames:

Which bier is mine?

Which one leads

to you?

What I want for my 60th Birthday

Everything. I want it all back.

I want to open the door to my double-Trinity
which smells of fresh bright yellow paint.

I want the cats, Louis and Clarke, to greet my
daughter, who is still just 4 years old. I want
her wearing a St. Peter's school blazer,
with the crest of the cross and key.

I want 3:30 sunlight hitting the stained glass
window above the door mantle;

making a rainbow on the virgin wood floor,
felled from an 1820 forest; uneven against
my back, but I don't care because I've made
my child into an airplane, one that will never
crash, not while I'm in control: just laughter
and spins; gentle landings and make-believe
places—Like her drawings I've taped all over
the fridge and walls. We hear the doorbell,
and know it's her father, so we race

to the door to see what he's brought over.

This time it's a child's rug with rockets and planets
which fits perfectly in her room on the 2nd floor.

It matches the four orange fish he brought

over last week: John, Paul, George, and Ringo.

Yes, I even want the fish back. And I want Emily
showing off her latest song on her 1/8th violin.

I want him, again, choking back tears
over the music and miracle of our child as he lights
a cigar and walks out the back porch, past
the blue Ulysses butterfly encased in glass.

I want him out there smoking and admiring
the Dutch wooden shoes I turned into planters
the way they do in the Netherlands. I want
marigolds blooming everywhere: vermilion, orange, gold.

I want Steve back, not just hearing his voice, or touching his
black curls smelling of whiskey. I want him in my bed
in my arms in that double-trinity on Hall Street:

not watching him stagger up a steel, industrial staircase
--so many flights--to a forbidding office with shut windows.

There is my desk but I'm not there; I'm just watching,
and locking the windows against greedy angels with their
bitten-down nails. As always he slings a briefcase over
my empty chair. In every dream the briefcase delivers
a cryptic note. But this time it says: "Keep everything."

Fishing by Torchlight

Betrayal plunges me each night
to the cold basement
of White Sand Lake,
where Eagle feathers sprout
from my scalp.

I walk through driftwood
and a seaweed forest.

Canoes float above me:
flames from Ojibwa torches
swim above my head like water stars.

Ojibwa hurl spears through the water
impaling Walleye to my left;
stabbing Northern Pike to my right.

But no spear strikes me on my lake journey.

Flashing scales and dancing blood
paint the water

as Indians lift gasping fish
to the surface. And again,

Spears thrust into the blue-gold
water to my left; then to my right
as I clear a path through the Lake's

seaweeds, smooth rocks, and driftwood.

My head aches with the weight
of wet, long Eagle feathers; downy feathers;
a Merganser crown.

I don't know how long I can hike this path
on the floor of White Sand Lake,
which my parents sold to Christian strangers.

I don't know if my lungs will burst,
but I know that breathing under
water is a rage wringing blood
from a child's deerskin tunic—
mine.

If I ever break surface,
the People will ask:

Why is your hair a mane of gold-gray feathers?

Did an eagle die for you?

Why is your face painted white for death and sorrow?

How many centuries have you walked the Lake's purple depths,
breathing the water 'til it boiled rough waves;
watching, and looking up at us?

Do you have any idea how long we have waited for you?

II. Stone by stone

I walked out of White Sand Lake.

Smell of pine and fiddlehead fern.

Spiderwebs glittered like diamonds

in the moonlight.

The Ojibwa waited on the shore

with a wool blanket and a crackling fire.

They wrapped me in deerskin and moccasins.

They lifted my heavy, wet headdress, and combed

my dripping black hair like I had just been born.

They cleaned my face and wiped my tears.

Then they placed an injured hummingbird

in my open palms.

“This is your first task,” they said.

“Heal the hummingbirds.

Your father sold their forest.”

III.

My mother says,

“All parents kill their children.”

Silence

before the flurry of wings

and talons.

Standing at the Gates of the Arctic

The Cherry tree

has shaken its blossoms.

Where there should be new leaves,

branches are dripping

with red enamel bees.

Your other family

kept me away from your death bed.

I will never know your last words.

Grinding the bones of bees

in the mortar and pestle of cruelty,

they said: "here, taste this."

Instead, you visit me each night

and we discuss portals

to the Dawn before Sunrise.

You appeared again last night:

Naked and muscular, holding out

snow-drenched rose petals

as your other family looked on.

I stood on the marble stairs

to your house: door unhinged.

Your other family did not allow our child and I
to attend the ceremony where they poured your ashes
into the Schulykill River. How could they know
that river is an open artery of my heart? How

could they know we made love there
blanketed by cherry blossoms? How could they
know that is where we took our daughter to feed
the snow geese? Or, that I stand there each
night waiting for Time to bend;
for ice to embrace the cherry blossoms;
waiting for the river to freeze over so I can skate
all the way to Eternity; where butterflies rain
into your open hands. I am standing
at the Gates of the Arctic.

