

## A Spider's Thread

## Persephone's Daughter

—song of myself at sixteen, circa 1960

The pickup's growl,  
gravel ground beneath the wheels,  
the screen door's screech and bang:  
hearts beat like startled birds.  
(Mother's eyes in caves of ice.)  
The old man is home.

Radio off, books forbidden.  
Demeter's pain in pages hidden  
deep in a chest  
beneath my Sunday dress—

*Persephone descends,  
a dagger clutched beneath her robe,  
nestled cold between her breasts,  
a dagger in anticipation  
of Hades' blade—  
earth growing dark; a chill descends.  
The old man is home.*

Dishes down, the table dressed  
in cold precision, the table white,  
laid dutifully in rank pretense by pious rule  
—later mother's smothered groans  
and mattress-screaming springs.

Disguise your eyes,  
look down and frown, not too much,  
careful now, just so. Look down!  
Be docile as Aunt Bess,  
pious as the preacher's wife,  
skirts kissing the kitchen floor.  
Bow down, *for now*.  
The old man is home.

*Hidden deep, the dagger honed  
by steel and stone  
in wet dreams of liberation,  
singing myself, dark nascent poetry.  
Fire, beneath my apron, ripe.  
Hot rain of joyful rage, Persephone  
reborn, emerging drenched in devil's blood,  
Hades dismembered—a trophy  
to lay at Demeter's feet.*

Rejoice upon the brink  
and spit out pomegranate seeds!

## The Girl Who Saved a World and Caught Melancholy in a Jar

—a summer's night stream

*Tears of light*, the girl thought strangely.  
The others merry, peering into jars alive:  
pagan fire, fields aglow, sparks of light....

She, apart, gazing into her own jar of fire:  
*holidays, rituals and revelry,*  
*Easter eggs and Rome, Good Friday*

*in the air, cruciation spikes aglow*  
*upon an anvil, the blacksmith singing psalms*  
*to the ringing of his hammer,*

the others' laughter, *faint echoes*  
*of the jeering crowd*, the others gleeful,  
chasing bright fleeting sparks of light

*to sacrifice on nightstand alters*  
—*worlds in jars*—  
*darkness making the lights scream.*

She, the crazy one, the others whisper  
—*and she thought they might be right*—  
poured out her jar in a river of lights

and screwed the lid down tight.

## Clocks of Sanity

*I woke to all ways of measure gone  
adrift upon a sea of glass, a shoreless sea*

An inch, an hour,  
a universe of yearning  
gone, an hourglass run dry:

not love nor hate, no glint of faith,  
not lust or envy lit the fires of desire,  
the secret source of reckoning  
that measures with the heart,  
in beats of swelling drum,  
all future and the past.  
*Want*, the mother of all hope,  
gone, the petals turned to ashes  
crushed and scattered.

I was laid upon a bed of ice  
to shiver there in spasms rhyming not  
with earthly clocks, not sun nor moon  
nor breath, nor rise and fall of tides....  
How long upon the ice I lay,  
an hour, a year, a month, a day  
upon a moonlike scape  
in endless, aimless space.

Then I was draped in walls of soothing gray  
and rocked, a gentle rocking there,  
*to-and-fro, to-and-fro*: a strange new clock  
that measured not but marched in place,  
a pointless rhyme, a metronome, *to-and-fro* ...

A raven came, eyes black as coal,  
and sank its talons deep into my chest,  
its beak at work upon my neck,  
but I cared not, cared not at all,  
*to-and-fro, to-and-fro*.... How long  
*to-and-fro, to-and-fro*, how long ago,  
*to-and-fro, to-and-fro, to-and-fro*—

I woke in time, in time once more,  
once more was born, time waking me  
for reasons all its own;  
before my eyes another moon, and I grew still:  
the hour hand began to move.

The raven flew, its wings my startled beating heart.

## A Spider's Thread

—a foundation bearing-capacity equation:

$$Q_u = c N_c + g D N_q + 0.5 g B N_g$$

A spider nimble, electric,  
like a droplet of ink,  
spins diaphanous thread,  
births a world of billowing silk  
suspended, a Daedalean bridge  
crisscrossing foundational footings,  
channels where cement will flow, harden,  
bear the weight of a mansion overlooking the sea.

*Below the mansion-to-be, surf booms, swirls white  
among jagged rocks; off shore, a hurricane considers the cliffs,  
hooks north headed for the shipping lanes, where captains  
change course, check fuel, stay close to charts, radio, and wheel.  
Some pray. Pictures are drawn from wallets, returned.  
Ships are tossed like toys on story-high swells  
in patterns of unfathomable, endless permutation.*

The spider's web, billowing silk,  
a milky way of vibrant lines  
bridging pine boards cut clean, a parallel  
set by steel rules, transom, level and string,  
awaiting the lava flow to anchor, to shape  
corridors of *bedrock* according to postulates,  
long proven calculations turned to rivers of stone.

*A cement truck takes up more than half of a seaside road,  
the mixing drum spinning, fifteen tons of cement  
slowly churning, soft, ready to pour, the driver  
singing along with a sad country song, heartbreak, divorce,  
blowing his horn on blind curves .....*

In the maze of footing boards the spider spins  
a strange geometry, her thin shell shining  
as if a light burned within; and somewhere a professor probes  
the spider's math, the intricate architecture, the number of jumps  
line to line, the spider makes to catch a fly, and exactly  
the weight the threads will bear—

*purls of unutterable verse, a muse of deadly lace,  
poised precarious, threads of magnificent math  
and a spider's knack, in a maze of calculations;  
the ocean bellows below the imagined mansion,  
a hurricane turns away from the cliffs,  
a captain's new course,  
and the sound of a horn like laughter.*

## Spirit Road

*Above the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel:*

The trace of an old wagon road  
—like faded tracks in snow  
or a man's passage through tall grass  
an hour before—a phantom trail,  
twists and turns through maple and beech,  
around steep hills of pine, winding deep,  
deep into the age-old wood,  
the way of a wounded deer fleeing the pack  
or a wisp of smoke from a dying fire.

Wild leeks in the air, the complaint of a crow,  
the crackle and hum of a hornets' nest.  
Winter's breath, faint as the smell of wild grapes,  
yet there, always there in this high place  
far north of paved roads and gathering places.

Small signs: the ghost of a wooden wheel  
long baked in mud grown brittle,  
a nail, a doll, naked, blind breasts, faceless,  
a tree bent back, lodged behind another,  
grown strange like a humpbacked man.  
A dozen partridges, the color of brush,  
completely without fear, move aside, disappear.

A clearing: trees felled, trimmed, stacked in rows.  
An ax, the handle rotted to dust, the head red with rust,  
lying where it fell, having let go slowly over the years,  
falling from the stump where it was left, embedded,  
losing faith in the hands that would lift it  
and finish the temple, hands that never returned.

The cry of a loon on a distant lake.  
A yellow leaf falls lazily down,  
riding complex currents of sun and wind;  
the forest sighs, an almost inaudible sigh

—north, a far place north, north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel,  
where a thousand years is the blink of an eye.