

White Blossoms at Night

In dark, we forget ourselves.
Blow out our lantern light.
Light in you, stars in the night sky.
Night sky, night-blooming
Imagination. *Ipomoea alba* spirals open.
Opening spiral: from lantern
Darkening, from bound revealing,
Then full white moon-flower.

Awakened to unfurling, a hawk moth
Swoops the expanse, its strength
Audible. A strongest sphinx rubs
Past anthers to the nectary,
And sips a sweetest nectar, most
Plentiful of all night-bloomings.
In dark, let's forget ourselves.
Blow out our lantern light.

Gone

Somewhere between Mt. Morris and Canandaigua,
driving route 5 and 20, I tap the brakes because
up ahead something is not right.

A pickup has pulled over, its flashers on.

Then I see a doe in the middle of the road, fallen or pulled
onto the painted stripes of the turning lane.

She is so still, so plainly gone;
not even the air currents of cars speeding past
ruffle her reddish fur.

I want so much to stop the car and go to her
and stroke her neck.

But this is a rural highway, and I do what's safe:
I tap the brakes and drive slowly past.

Where He Floats in Shallow Water

“You get your rest,” I had said not even a week before.
He had shot morphine for his pain, and his head rolled back.
Now, where he lies in his polished casket, I pause
on the kneeler, this moment nearly as intimate,
a last chance to study the brow, the nose, the curve
of the ear. He did not bear this still face last week;
he is slathered with makeup and painted with lipstick.
I do not entirely recognize him.

As I stand to turn away, I see his big watch ticking
with enormous energy -- solid proof time is relentless;
it drags me around like the thread-thin hand sweeps
past the seconds, drags me back to this scene, this room
when I had wanted to leave lightly, to deny how much of him
I did not know, to drift backward, to walk with him
down the street to the stone stairs, to watch him
slip off his sneakers and step into the black mud of low tide.

Two bleach bottles full of sand and rocks anchor
his small row boat. He walks carefully,
sinking to his ankles in the mud. He does not slow
when he reaches the incoming tide, so I know it is
a warm tide, heated by the late summer Gulf Stream
and its own drift over the flats to this cove.
The ocean is nearly to his knees when he arrives
at the tiny blue boat. He finds his bailer, a coffee can,

and sits, with careful balance, on the square stern.
There, where he floats in shallow water, he pours
a full can over his muddy feet and brushes the mud
off with his free hand. He racks the oars and rows to shore
to let me climb in, wobbling, and to drag my hands
in the water as he maneuvers us out of the cove
where a fine mist lifts off the water and we breathe in
the ocean air on that hot summer day.

The Edge

First delicate arc of waxing moon and sky still sapphire overhead
but darkening just above the trees. Venus off to the left,
as if it had spilled from the lunar goblet. I know I will yearn
for this. I tell myself, remember: sapphire and moon.

I have reached the river bank where spilling past is half fresh water,
half sea. Kaleidoscope of fog, leaves and the soft, greenish feathers
from the bellies of goslings swirl the air. I grab at paper flying by,
but it is past reach. Words so carefully written: my instructions?

I squint, as if I were fighting astigmatism of the mind or of the spirit,
where not the spot, but the notion, is unreliable, dubious.
Will I be wading into bliss or into the Acheron, the river of woe?
Here is the boundary between myself and the rest of possibility.

Past the demark, what? At this edge so often, I'm prepared
when my half-hearted self refuses to step, so when the strain hits
I unwrap a sandwich, ponder the crunch of its cucumber, sting of its salt.
Remember this, I whisper to myself: cucumber and salt.

But already my world is shifting. The wind tugs at my resistance.
I pull off my shoes and reach one foot into the river current
and swirling fog. I must walk; I must arrive. If I need a way back, I must
remember: cucumber and moon; sapphire and salt.

They Are Revealed by Their Shadows

I see but reflection of the morning light
gleaming from the low-tide mud, a gorgeous mud
mottled with rocks and kelp. Then a shadow moves

and the first bird is revealed. A second tiptoes
alongside, then a third; a flock of fellows moving
lightly over the uneven surface. Sanderlings.

Over to the left, another, and since now I am
focused, I see a fifth staring, like I have been staring,
at the ocean's edge where the waves carry rills of sunlight.