

Finding Herself

You got a beer for me?

That deep red violet of her voice but not
the coffee of her eyes. I don't ask when she fell
off the wagon, haven't seen her since she died
that bright day when breath left her cavity
and my arms, a tern broken free of earth's pulls.

Dusty as her things – reappearing too –
this more-than-old woman takes in her disarray
of draw knives, tung oil, shoe forms, leather.
Grinder, spoke shaves, pipe organ parts.
The ear she sculpted. Zip ties, yarn, boat cleats,
rope. Her dead gaze sifts projects left undone.

I used to be one of them.
My unravelings and I had moved in
at ground level while upstairs
illness climbed in with her.
I am embarrassingly available!
she crowed. Stayed alive listening

to disciples like me. And didn't we like
bringing our stinging holes to her side
with teas and soups and salves. For her,
of course. That orange morning I
was there, my questions simmering.
Said supper would be her favorite.

I loved her love of denying any end.
Saw how she shimmered
on the boat in stained pink turtleneck.
Summer-of-love break from chemo.
Cocky in a cockpit lean. Arms
spread. Brown hands playing the life line.

She rang like a gull in the wind.
A buoy bell waving at every boat
in the net of that day.
Howled at the sight of my tightened
buckles, my grip hold
with the companionway.

But here, a haze of unmeasured
distance between us, no clear us
to peer through the must for,
not even a *what, dear?*— that
intimate cover for hardness of hearing
or drowning pain.

With a rasp she asks
Is the boat in yet?
I say no, still some work
before she goes on the ways.
*Tell Flann I'll help. Could use
another go.*

What does she mean this time? Another
go at finding herself after going
over? At holding some wood in her hands?
Searching in fog is again
all there is. Clanging
lonely dismembered sounds.

Current Conditions

The forecast was for small seas
and good wind. But this
is no wind and a heaving sea. Nothing
to do but keep engine running
and the sail cloth bundled on the boom.

Small twirling propeller
asking our way forward.

A gull lifts away, wings,
toes, distant eyes, from the surface
we shared for as long as I noticed,
a breath between swells
while the roiling rebuilds.

Beside me is the one in this churn
with me. Hand on tiller.
Our torsos seek
some center of gravity.

Did the gull roll
cold blue eyes
as she flew to another
bubble in her day? Uninclined
toward mechanics of attachment,
degrees of offness or a look
back into this cockpit at two

mid-to-late humans
in ski hats and Goretex,
thermosed tea rolling
around their feet with the remnants
of last night's conversation.

The depth sounder is seeing
seaweed again, flashes
an impossible fate. The GPS argues
there's no way we'd hit bottom
here but we could be more like the gull
at staying on course.

Another swell breaks
over the bow. Spray
runs through the scuppers,
circles our hips as we dip
into the next trough and continue
reeling side to side to side.