

A Satisfied Man

A drink or two into the evening,
eyes wet with sentiment to make it so,
you used to declare your satisfaction:
five strong children
and a beautiful wife.
But how to keep that mantel?
The girls got fat. The boys
stuttered and failed.
The wife left out and ruined
in the rain.

Dogs ran the ravine
of your soul. Their
ceaseless baying
the one sound—how you
silenced it!—that
might have led you
to what flew up ahead.

Dreaming Still

You liked rocks with your water,
so there you stand, and, over here, me—
hip-deep the river runs hard
but holds no real danger.
Just so, while I went from nada, to gilled, to girl,
you smoked, drank, weighed alternatives,
even caught German measles—
yet I arrived entire as all the rest:
pleasing you with a willingness
to engage in peaceful contemplation
of my five-fingered hands.

You used to boast how young
you brought your babies to these mountains:
cradled on stone, suckling
stream water from your thumb.
How else to bring us home,
for you'd known—would know—
no other?

The water's metal-sweet mingles
with marten scat and pine.
The river keeps its studied calm,
pushing and pulling,
never sweeping us away,
only holding: me here, you there.
Breaching its roar would be like
calling from that womb—
I couldn't. I don't.
Those perfect fingers fill with longing
but not to draw nearer
nor yet to fall further apart.

I used to beg to live here forever.
You'd laugh, saying that was impossible,
but I saw the high-peaked houses
as we descended to the city
and recalled another nine-year-old's pious declaration:
all things possible from a mustard seed.

All my want was your want,
I knew no other.

And surely, here in the night,
the river roaring boulder to boulder
all *is* possible, so why,
when in other dreams
something always happens,
does this one stay the same?
Why, for all the power inside and out,
does this remain our still life?

Winter's Medley

Wisdom is an albatross in Hawaii
Advised of gusts up to forty or fifty
miles an hour, drivers of high-profile vehicles
use caution followed by a sixty car pile up
sans fatality and the elephants reloaded
without incident. Wisdom has hatched
a chick at sixty-two; a child dies in an idling,
snow-buried Taurus;
a mother follows her daughter under the ice;
skiers cross country roads and dogs
flounder in joy. An albatross will mate for life
and live who knows how long before Wisdom,
bereaved, moved on and conceived.
At forty degrees the titmice, who live
much tinier, quick-hearted lives, sing
their sap-coaxing, "Spring, spring, spring."
Winter Aconite yellows the dooryard
between snows all the while Wisdom flies
miles and miles over the warm ocean
after something her chick desires.

Myth, Reverberated

Narcissus's daughter gazes into the same pool
but instead of herself
sees sky, clouds, a ring of firs
dusted with snow.
Once her father named
the rocks along the shore
but she forgets—
like wind on a flower, his descriptions
make her nod but then move on.

Is she a flower? The same flower as him?
She tries to spell it. Can't.
It slips away like that wind.
Such a nest of S's and a soft C to boot!
Well, no matter,
she can't stop to think: she must stay alert,
wary as Echo
who pops up from behind
the nameless rocks now and again,
knocking snow out of the firs.
"Hey!" The daughter, friendly.
Hey, hey, the reply.

It's true,
her father is good-looking.
Quick. Whip-smart. He knows
the names of things and how they work
or how to fix them when they don't.
So her mother says, always adding
that he'd warned her about his temper
before they married.
No nonsense—at least when she isn't drinking—
what sort of flower would her mother be?
Daisies are her favorite,
sensible, sturdy.
Ever vague about details,
the daughter offers
fists of iris instead.

Sometimes it's her mother's face
in the pool. Everyone tells her
she looks just like her mother,

so it's not surprising to see her there—
the firs and no-name rocks framing
a distracted nod and smile,
accepting the daughter's bouquet.

Here is her father's face on the water, too:
eyes wet with wine and longing.
He tells her she can become anything she wants,
But what would that be? He laughs—
then more words she can't spell—
Unbelievably beautiful— my little Siren!

They say she's shy,
which must explain how his praise folds her
like a bloom at dusk—
her alarm just the sort of nuance lost on him:
he's in such a good mood!
She sits between them—
her mother looking out across the water,
her father so close, leaning into her neck
his kiss bending her reflection like a
stem.

For once, her mother comes to the rescue:
“I think she's plain as pudding
and will crochet doilies at home forever.”
Her father lifts his face, annoyed, oblivious to
the fist-sized bubble wobbling toward his frown.
Surely it will kill him!
The daughter leans out to stop—
Don't, don't, cries Echo—too late,
The daughter follows
her outstretched hand.

Down down; cold cold—
well, no, not so cold as all that.
And at least she is sure of one thing, now,
for if she were a flower
she wouldn't sink so.

Underwater, a landscape
never mentioned, let alone named.
She strikes the massive boulders that surround her
as if it was their fault,

then—not fun underwater—weeps.
At last, she picks herself up out of the muck to marvel:
what a world! Myriad, enticing, lush.
She investigates facets, folds; sharp, smooth.
then wraps herself round each to have
their weight at her disposal, to offer up her own.

When at last she has to go up for air,
she finds two flowers blooming on the shore:
a narssi, narcci—daffodil. Pure phonetics:
guileless, without pretense, exposed.
And the other? An iris—perhaps
the best choice for her mother, after all:
intricate and convoluted,
white as the scatter of snow.

And is that a storm coming?
No, it's only poor Echo,
answering the daughter's anguish
with all that's left:
Alas, alas.

Each spring, the
two flowers bloom—
then wither the way flowers do,
and though the daughter promised to return,
Echo has only the wind in the firs
and the water along the shore to repeat.

Meanwhile,
though she's never quite
got the hang of spelling,
the daughter does manage to become
more or less who she is.
And though she'll
never go back,
she's destined to recall:
a sheen of ice forming on the pond's surface
the sky's reflection accordingly black.
The firs the barest contrast round the edge,
and Echo receding and returning:
sough-lap, sough-lap.