

The Wrack Line

Four poems

Wrack: "a fragment of something that has been destroyed; wreckage cast on the shore" --Webster's New World Dictionary

1. "The Wrack Line in Third Cove"

For more than thirty years,
I've combed the wrack line
At Third Cove.
The old-timers called it that,
Though no one does now.
Except me.
They're all gone,
The fellow beachcombers I loved.
I'm looking for lost chemistry,
A familiar momentum to overcome
The inertia of our separateness.
I'm looking for a sign,
A sign that they're still here,
Living among the sea-tangle,
Their songs on the wave crests,
Sung by selkies who have
Heard the latest underwater news,
Who commune with the living and the dead.

I faithfully follow the line of destruction,
Branched, studded with empty shells,
Cluttered with curled bark of dead trees,
The discarded crab claw,
The bleached clavicle of a small animal,
A deer or raccoon, plucked clean by
Eagles, vultures, ravens, and crows,
Polished by bite-sized crabs.
A white stone flashes in weak sunlight,
I pick it out of the sand, sending a swarm of
Skittering black and gray dots back into hiding.
What do sand fleas eat, I wonder?
I hold the smoke they leave,
Mingled with the breath of the polished stone,
Warm to the touch,
A compressed sphere of ancient Earth,
Where kings and queens were buried long ago.

It whispers secrets to me,
With the soft wave whispers,
Of those I have lost.

2. "Like Any Bird"

A bold Raven struts on the shore,
She knows where she's going,
Swishing her iridescent black tail
Back and forth.
I know the signs.
She has a carcass in sight,
She will feed quickly, then call her clan
To clean the bones.
Imagine the freedom
Of a woman, who could walk
Bare-breasted on the beach,
Tail swishing,
Without hindrance or shame,
Like any bird.

3. "Down the Line"

Meandering down the line,
I have no beads to trade
With anyone today.
I watch the tide,
As it washes in,
Laying down the wrack line.
I look for anything
To trade for a memory
Of someone I lost,
The man who moved down the line.
I look for anything,
Nestled in torn kelp,
Buried in the mud,
The kind that rains underwater,

Muck-colored, yellow-brown,
Furred like a death pelt,
Six feet under the sea.
I look for anything to hold
Against the time we've lost,
To trade for a memory.
A painted chip is barely visible
Tangled in sea grass,
Pale blue on white china.
A broken dish made in Japan,
Washed cleaner than a desert bone.
Blue, like my eyes, faded a little,
But still alive and blue,
The color of the cove today,
The color of the sky
When he was with me.

4. "All Sorrow is Sacred"

Moonlight on Third Cove
Flows gently, silverplating the waves.
Silence is silver this evening.
No birdsong, no ferry rumbling
In the channel.
I hear only the soft air brush
Of bats fishing the night air.

The slow, whispering waves erase
All footprints of the day.
Clearing the beach for a fresh start.
What the waves whisper
As they work their magic:
"All sorrow is sacred."

