

The First Time I Awoke Beside You

The first time I awoke beside you  
the dawn was cracking like the pane of ice  
on the shore of the Shenandoah, true  
and delicate as the new year, and twice  
I had to remind myself: *yes*. The first  
time I awoke beside you the whole world  
knew what was changed, knew I had searched and searched  
and finally found my only self, a pearl  
diver emerging from the deep to draw  
a breath and only then to feel the treasure  
in his fingers, reconfigure all  
he'd hoped for yesterday, take in the measure  
of his fortune. The first time beside  
you the door to life was opening wide.

Our Wake

I have built you a boat, my love — the joints  
are tight, the timbers true, the tapered lines  
murmur chanties and swells and compass points,  
cargoes rich with spices, silks, incense, wine.  
This is our boat. Come aboard. I will take  
up the oars and bend my back to the sea;  
our boat will glide like a skipjack, our wake  
will spread the seawrack streaming behind; free  
from the cares we've discarded on the shore,  
I watch them shrink behind you, far astern.  
You fix your eyes forward, past me, past more  
than the heaving prow, the horizon burning  
rose, burgundy — no charts for where we  
are bound, no land, no boat, no sky, no sea.

The Tell

Oh, you're good. The way you walk, with your long-  
legged saxophone sashay, and your laugh,  
like ice cubes in a cocktail glass, a song  
on the oldies-but-goodies station, half  
an hour from home and not a cop in sight,  
"Sophisticated Lady," maybe. "My  
Funny Valentine" sounds so good at night,  
barely a major key, a secret life  
of hurts endured, hurts inflicted, of shame  
concealed with smiles, the heart's elusive code  
of righteous style refusing to be wrong,  
brushes on the snare. Oh, they know your game,  
those jazz guys. Do you think that I don't know?  
Do you think I didn't know all along?

Beauty

That photo. The one you saved, all these years.  
Now of course hidden away, out of sight,  
but go find it, look, remember: you're here  
again, you're on the trail, climbing, it might  
have been an hour or so, Gap Mountain, up,  
up over rocks and roots, through forest thick  
with the brilliance of October, on up  
to the clearing so blandly marked View. Pick  
up your camera, snap the moment, snap  
lots of moments. But that's the one, and there  
she is, half punch-drunk with the sun on Gap  
Mountain. The one you framed, stared at. Hid. Where?  
You know. Isn't this what you said you lived  
for? So look — beauty stabs you like a shiv.

The First Time We Parted

The first time we parted — should I have seen more than I saw? Men are such dogs, we just see what we want to see — barely that. Green winter jacket, cinched at the waist, a gust of cold, cold wind blowing her gypsy curls across her face (too stubborn for a hat, so vain about that hair), slow shuffling, her long body bent — with sadness, she would later explain. She didn't know I was watching. At least, that's what she said, when this prologue had ended, and we knew we were caught up in a long, long story — all hello, I thought, never goodbye. Well, at least I saw that much: this is what goodbye looks like.