

ETYMOLOGY OF TRANSGRESSION

from Latin, *transgressus*: to step across or beyond

A violation of a law, command, or duty

A relative rise in sea level, resulting in deposition of marine strata over terrestrial strata

Poised at the threshold
the choice is always
to step across, or turn back.
She thought he was a doorway
to rapture, but like the gods
he had no conscience, he didn't
recognize the word, whispering
aubades in the woodferns, remorseless
in his beauty and lyricism.
She thought he was a doorway
but a door doesn't stray
or lapse, the jamb holds fast
solid as the house around it.
He was green silk and shadow,
hawk-shadow over grass, desire
disguised as thunderhead
and white bull calf. Savoring

her secret peril, she crept the path
at dawn. By noon he was gone
in a blaze of tiger lilies
untouched by guilt or loss.
But when goddesses grieve, they rage
and the seas boil, saltwater
floods the fields and valleys
until the forests are submerged,
maples lush as seaweed
swaying, the gate of ferns
she stepped across fluid as kelp,
lapping the fallen sugar house,
now a sunken galleon, lost treasure
spilled below the known world.

SUMMER SOLSTICE

Cresting the hill on a high tide of buttercups,
daisies, Susans, a convergence of storms
from near and beyond, you swore you would never
be so free with yourself, but you were wrong.
The strawberry moon waxed like clotted cream
and there you were again loosening the girdle,
twining rugosa in your hair, ducking the blackberry arbor
in a gauntlet of stinging nettles, rough thorns
clutching your bare legs but never mind—
you're invincible in your silver-link chainmail,
you wove a garter of cherry-stones and slid it
up your thigh, you can survive for three days
on dew and red clover, you cast a spell
of protection on the forest gate
and consecrated the ferns with your nectar.

Little moon-calf, let this run its course.
If he lit your imagination like a torch, forgive him
and keep burning. You could be curled
in the sick room under crimson sheets, purging shadows
through your pelvic floor, when out the back door
and up the green hill there are crowns to weave,
petals to pull, *he loves me, he loves me not*,
fingers quick and patient, parting silk from cream,
the last petal placed in the old hollow apple
where you offered the violet and lilac in turn,
binding June's spell with three opium seedpods
a poppy bouquet in an iron horseshoe
twisted with mint and lavender spires,
drawing down the moon one more time
while the Ferryman waits at the river of oblivion
holds his pole poised in the milk-dark balance,
the questions drip-dropping like water
in a cave: what you'll give up,
what you're willing to pay.

RISK

Ice tumbles into the glass. I'll take
my summer shaken, not stirred.
The *Pursuit of Happiness* rumbled

the harbor at 9 am, a crowd of revelers
reeling astern. Grannie spied through binoculars
from her high white porch, sharp eyes

keeping tabs on the neighbors, the wildlife,
the baby ospreys keening in their nest,
weakly swallowing another mackerel, gathering

strength for late August flight.
I miss the sanctified dawn and the secret glory.
Up here all we do is sleep, lulled

into drowsy contentment at the abundance of sun
and time, ice cream and crab dip.
We've already explored the outlying islands

eaten beach plums on Outer Heron,
hunted the rumor of a treasure chest
sunk in the interior, heard the headless ghost

of Damariscove calling for his lost dog.
Past the Thread of Life shimmers open ocean
but we don't have permission, nor enough gas.

Back in the Cove the children shriek
Look, it's the *Happiness!* and yes she's back
in time for cocktails at the club

with *Illusion*, *Surprise*, *Spellbound* and *Dido*,
Outrageous, *Panacea*, and *Promises*.
Oysters on the half-shell with smiles of lemon.

Porch sunset with seagulls, masts clinking.
If I was waiting for a sea-change
it's not coming this year. Ice tumbles

into the glass. You can take it
or leave it. You usually take it.
Evening comes on blurred at the seams,

the beginnings of mist
wispings over flat ocean. Trick
of the eye, slip of the tongue, I'm longing

for longing for longing again, the beautiful risk
of losing everything.

THIEVES

The girls bury themselves
all summer at the pond—hips, knees, feet, toes—
packing down sand into a mounded

mud body-cast. *Mommy bring me water,
bring me more mud*, smoothing the surface
till no flesh is visible, warding off the sadness

of late summer— dry grasses, all crickets,
no frogs. I've been waiting since June.
My Summer Storm hibiscus

finally blooms, yields one luscious,
tropical, crepe-petalled flower.
The watchfires burn at 6 am, absence

and heat everywhere, the clandestine
rustle of turning leaves. Go ahead, ruin me—
I'm already ruined, slipping like a thief

through jewelweed, milkweed, fireweed.
I lead the girls to the secret orchard,
show them how to jimmy the gate, squeeze

sideways beneath the chain, enter the ripening
corridors of fruit. *If you only pick the fallen,
it's not stealing* I explain, my made-up

morality, my justification for taking.
Drawn to abundance. Drawn to sustenance.
Amber peaches blush like hothouse roses,

skins the color of a thousand sunsets, rows
of trees silvered like olive groves
in Tuscany, trunks split and groaning, branches

bowed under the hard weight of peaches.
If we can't release the pressure, we can bend
to the ground, gather the fallen

gently in our arms, carry them home
cradled inside our shirts.

SOMETHING BORROWED

Afterwards, she drew a hot bath
with sea salt and jasmine oil, threw in
the two flowers he gave her on the road—
snapdragons, milk-white and scarlet,
grown in his wife's rich garden.
The spring poured out of the side
of the hill, spilled over the stone basin
free for the taking. She pulled over.
Eyes, hands, a glass jar of spring water.
The morning yielded to them again, a tangle
of pain and desire, high pressure system
blown in like sheets pulled off a bed,
washing the air clear, shudder
of the season turning, the gods
taking summer back and back. What if
this coveting was a gift, not a sorrow?
All she could do was watch the wet blossoms
float glazed in tub water, lay them in an X
across her nipples and belly, how they held
their shape and did not drown. Turn on
the cold faucet and drink
from cupped palms. A mighty thirst,
as if her skin were salted. As if the stems
traced a map to a secret room
built entirely of ferns at dawn.