

Apocalypse

The polar bears were fine,
despite the odds.

Meteorology

In March 500 whales washed up the beach,
clogging the shore with stink and bulk.
When they died my mother cried until her eyes filled up the sea
but I was nine years old and I didn't understand death.

In early June the sun went out.
His offspring curled in my mother's breast, decrepit and unborn.
He'd steal her skin and walk the backstreets of my house
and when I was twelve years old I learned to kill so I could cut him out.

Come August the Equinox invited me for tea.
He sliced up my skin for finger sandwiches and drained the water from my veins.
"Better than rosewater," he promised.
I was seventeen and lonely. I ate and drank myself.

December asked for gifts.
I gave him my ulcerous mouth to make a sea,
and my eyes to fuel the sun.
I was twenty-two. It all seemed so absurd.

The Desert

You want to be written as a poem.
A soliloquy, an unsolicited letter or a
card with a hundred Meanings
and Special Words capitalized for Effect.

I could write you as a play.
As you have written me.

I'll call it *Shadow over Daughter* to confuse the critics.
As in "daughter the word or daughter the concept?"

You'll be Director and place me in the wings.
Bid me, "on your cue walk center stage,
address the crowd.
Say something witty,
or pause and become a child again.
Love me as I love you."

Things like that dry out poetry.

But you fear no desert.
You have more groundwater than a bog or a clogged gutter.
You open your chest and in your guts churns
a turbid sea against a heartbeat shore.

You tell me you can hear my poems there.

Things like that dry out poetry.

Adriatic

Summer is a Grecian bathhouse
where vessels knock their hulls against the piers
and gulls protest,
with meek disinterest
the music of the spheres.

In the end autumn mourns its own coming.

Winter Dinosaurs

The year yawns closed like a drunk with oblong teeth,
each month a tartar-stained molar to mark the sluggish drag
of mountainous feet through yellow smog.
We pass through those jaws like hints of luminous apple skin.

We are winter dinosaurs,
bones erect in snow, a bulgy sculpture garden in the city center.
Children rearrange our finger-bones
while their fathers talk business beneath the umbrellas of our femurs.
Stationary, we become rectories for grey-blue birds
that commiserate in our eye sockets
on the misfortune of their children smothered by cold.

Our skeletons stand like dignitaries to the oncoming night,
mementos draped in reverence.
Draped like a christening blanket, a wedding veil,
a casual nightgown over the back of an armchair.

When the wind blows we clack together –
your spine, my wrist, the skull of Napoleon's horse –
collecting fragments of very old voices into one great moan.

Sous un ciel brouillé

Today you and I walk the piers and quays
to watch the ships return from Africa.
Winter and littered light are on the bay
and six-o-clock on the basilica,
the knell of afternoon. The lull and sway
of bell and day drink of Arabica
in this tepid hour. The mainsails mourn
their sleep. The storied keels creak for sojourn.

Sleep. The harpooned whale whose gut
the lantern ate and spat back light to light
the way. Home from sea the tired tern
returns to nest and sleeps while aging night's dull creep
shucks boatswains like barnacles from the remains of day.

Gather and go, like ships from harbor went,
when by King Francis' hand Columbus sailed
for the horizon. Emptied, the arrondissement
is still. Sous le ciel brouillé, the ode
of distant ash, the dusk exhales. Both spent,
we wander home. The braille of cobbled roads
sets us adrift in gently churned ennui
like bottled love-notes cast into the sea.

The Crab

Sadness is a delicate crab shell
that gusts along the dirtied coin of shore.
The husk of bitter things I pick and wonder at:
The claws that move, the baubles of eye-dark.
I am reflected there.
Without my ears, my skin—
 dull clown it makes of me, that shell.

Dull clown.

I learn the art of counting backwards.

Aloft

Imagine the structure of my sanity.
A crossword puzzle with no black squares.

Yes, my mind is the great deck of a one man sinking ship.
The unbearably bulging chewing gum in the visage of
Ulcerous sirens beckon from below, in my grandmother's maiden-tongue.
"Come on in, the water's fine, if you forget the cold..."

Aloft, a cat dangles by his elbows, speaking in tongues and fingertips.
He says "Milk is milk and islands stay islands until they crash.
All shepherds are raceless and beautiful in the night.

But I am no shepherd.

I am man made soft by too much water.
Look for me in the lily-pond.
In the vastness of that sunken universe I am a butterfly
with wings like weeping orchids.
My God watches from the deep den of his perch in the corner window.
Dares me to fly, "but not too close," he says, "to the sun."

"For there you have your Hindu fires and
your Norse fires and
you, my love
wear a newspaper suit and a sackcloth mask."

That god has slept in me for eons, a love immune to time.
He cursed my blue birth, and together we condemned my mother to squalor.
We were alchemists tripping poison onto rice paper
just to watch it burn and we lived in one another's skin like maggots.

I grew through him, emerged a haunted ocean full of whales.

Now I am a hare beneath his feet,
Bare-boned and sprinting, each step a rut
in the path he's made to the sucking trap
where I must bleed.