

FATALISM

-after "El Flautista" ("The Flutist"), Remedios Varo; 1955

A cardinal touches down on a Japanese maple
but can't tell us where they've taken

all the children. We take turns watching,
we take turns playing songs for the mothers:

their grief, our grief, might merge
to form a thing that could unseal a stone

from the mountain. Only there is no one
walking out into the light as if resurrected.

That copper-tinged wind, that citadel
whose once beautiful blueprint is fading.

The light, too, is dismantling; or in the throes
of change. My face is the inside of a shell up-

turned to the moon. A rune, a coelacanth.
Night-blooming cereus stranded in time.

WHEN I THINK I COULD BE BEAUTIFUL

Though I too live in a blur of worlds, I am one
shade of brown: my blood not as obviously mixed.

Who gave me this nose? I have no dimples. I have a brow
broad as a page. The eyes tell when I am smiling.

And eyebrows constitute a language of their own. Never
asleep, they are two republics separated by a bridge.

Do you know the power of discarded fishbones?
I know delight can interchange with dilate.

I've strung the dried stumps of my daughters' birth
cords on a safety pin; this is one way I keep them close.

Do you know the sound the tin bucket makes, the shape
of its mouth as it looks at the sky from inside the well?

In the birdhouse made from hollowed-out wood: wasps
coming and going. They are not angry yet, only nesting.

The ginger flower's torch burns with scent in the middle
of the garden. Not even the rain can put it out.

TEXTURE OF THE LOST

What poverty is amplified by stacks of moving boxes? Somewhere in the depths of one: a pile of unpaired socks, a spoon without its fork, a book whose frontispiece is missing. In the grooves of the madeleine pan, a memory that sticks and will never come off. Are the simplest things the best? In her mind, she subtracts one piece of furniture after another. He has a turkey sandwich on wheat every single day. She can't. She needs to mix things up, so her taste buds remember the yellow of pineapples, the bright bitter green of kale. Where posters were once held to the wall with little bits of putty, now there are oil spots darker than paint. Once, as she stood in front of a shop window, the blur of a passing truck wrote letters in reverse on her forehead.

HIBERNAL

So long now has that story of deep wintering
obsessed me: how the club-footed god sets his sights,

plucks a girl out of a field as easily
as a flower, takes her down with him.

Which is to say, look beyond the metaphor of brute
abduction to the underworld. But for the most part,

this has been the mother's story— how she scours
the land and badgers the powers that be to get her back.

Fallow the fields and seas; famine and drought,
fruitlessness, the icy blade of her anger raking

across the countryside— I've wished too
for that wide level of influence but mine

doesn't extend as far. Season after season
I work but brace myself for another

failure to raise ransom for permanent
parole. Season after season, stoic, I keep

clean and stark the banner of my hope:
bone buried in a field of snow.

ELEGY FOR LOSS

When the cleaning women come again it takes much more
cajoling before you let them into your house, let them

scrub the grime caked over nearly a year on floorboards,
bathroom tile, kitchen cabinets, shelves still groaning

with the weight of every last rusted spoon and knick-knack
you salvaged from your other life— Then, you were known

as wife of the retired judge everyone remembers, dapper
to your own hand-crafted elegance. Perlita says, gently,

*Let us wipe the dust off this picture frame, then
you can put it back in your bedroom. Nothing is*

going to disappear. How long has it been since you lifted
the faded mustard flannel draped over the Winkelmann

upright piano, since anyone ran fingers over its
yellowed keys? Trembling mallets wrapped in wool

stop just short of the soundboard. Has the refrigerator
light gone out, or has someone disconnected the appliance?

Extravagance, surplus poured around the ordinary:
for you, slipping a half stick of butter into a pot

of pasta; or saying that in some countries, men show admiration
for women by slapping their butts. Do you remember going

into the shoe store downtown at least once a month? Now
I'm told you shuffle around in a pair of plastic hospital

slippers from your recent confinement. The last time we speak
on the telephone, you cycle from crying over your empty bank

accounts to railing about the loss of your house. How
to write about a room with a bare light bulb, a threadbare

sofa, half a moon broken clean in the sky from its shadow?
This elegy for everything we've lost, and lost between us.

THEORY OF INSTRUCTION

The light, and the flower inside it; its flickering,
its gradual fading. Trickle of sand in a glass crucible
correcting itself, spelling out time. Everywhere
there are streets named after saints or dead
dictators— in this way we are reminded every memory
can negotiate its price. Don't we already have fables
that try to pass for facts? In blue cages on the patio,
children chirp lessons until the curator comes to spread
a grey drop cloth. In college, my art professor
pointed to a slide of St. Theresa, the angel's lance
poised above the flesh of her breast. Isn't that how we
look in the throes of falling or flying? I was taught
suffering is another name for holy. I was told to distrust
the beautiful flames of pleasure that sing like birds.

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