

POINSETTIA

The poinsettia on the sun-baked terrace
did not falter,
kept the integrity of its crisp tapered leaves
festive red like a show of petals.
The red, tinged neither orange or violet,
matched the creamy lipstick
my grandmother wiped
from her lips in 1963 in Piraeus
on her balcony perched over the shiny port.
The coupling was unmistakable:
the potted leaves
keeping me company
fluttering in slips of breeze off Biscayne Bay
quivered like her lips
mouthing the telegram my father was lost
at sea, as the sun
scaled up the sequined blue facade
of the high-rise in my view.

She delayed getting croissants that morning,
she looked at the black acrylic telephone
not sure what to do,
mulling her whispery losses--
He was sipping ouzo in a café by the water,
probably meeting a foreign lady
much too young
he would capture like the rind of a lemon
with a stirrer in his drink--
She was probably sexy as the hull of a ship,
desire rising like a quinine fizz--
The perpetual girl who wore *L'Air du Temps*
but gardenia underneath
that could strangle like a vine
the incense shrouding my mother
as she crossed the street holding children.

I lifted the underside of the leaf
still a boy compelled to examine sadness,
and found the other woman
no one talked about:
the red a ghost of its color,
chalky as the face of a sinner who's been caught,
pale as the face that tried to absolve itself
emerging out of a steaming bath
vaporized and clean,
the skin vigorously coated with talc
as we must dust the newborn,
cloak with innocence, erase, restart.

I watched offices empty, dusk drank its light
cascading down glass
streaked with graffiti of traffic,
into the fluorescent fishbowl
of the spotless lobby
where a woman with enamel skin
made an entrance
in a pungent cloud of glistening hairspray,
on the long tongue of her silk lapel
a pinwheel of leaves of cream-white poinsettia--
corsage for a wedding
or happy funeral.
She puckered her lips in a vintage
gold mirror she flipped open with an iron nail
and gave my name to the concierge.

AT MIDNIGHT

when my mother's thin hands
pulled the plug on the lights
the Christmas tree froze into

a filigreed silhouette of needles.
Tinsel trembled in ambient light.
I counted to seven. I waited for

hunger's singe to pass, the snow
to fall in the glass globe's lens
sitting on the apron under the bow

of branches, and bury my father
toppled like a log beside his dogs.
I channeled the metallic spheres

to twirl among the solemn angels,
watch fugitive stars pan the peeling
ceiling: cobalt blue, wagon red,

shamrock green--then swim inside
the lining of the cape of the acrobat
in tights who tried at night to rescue

me on a moonlit platinum sleigh.
Not ready, I pressed the last grains
of sugar with my fingers from

a cookie neatly snapped, savoring
the sweet tangy crumble as I licked
each tip, dissolving him into exile.

I was counting in my intermittent
fits of sleep the burned-out bulbs,
miniature icons suspended on taut

silver threads to watch me all night.
I was waiting for my recompense,
the one sheer blast of snow to ride

in the spinnaker of his cape--*fast*

*please, I beg--*before mother would
wake, electrify the sleeping tree,
its palace of lights, to comfort me.

BLUE

Blue light on dark rivers,
blue notes floating in veils of wind
down cerulean canyons whose denouement
issues into fields of tiny bluets
limning the dawn.

I covet delusions--
my dispersal of bluish stars
drifting back from frayed peripheries--
periwinkle glinting wet the eye,
and two sapphires shy recessed in the iris.

I see a child's face face the world
like aqua light borne in water blinking awake.
What theatre of stars doesn't expire?
I stand in the night heat
of high summer, unable to gather nettings

of stars imparted with still explosions,
only learning to lose them.
Once I could locate out of love
the tendrils of constellations, always
re-arranging like the footprints of a dance

behind the whispers of a thousand roofs.
Eventually they rise out of the fringe of trees,
and drape garlands in the pond
around a wading moon
whose sheath I float through with my madness.

DEATH OF THE ARGUMENT

Your flung cup with the rough
glaze that pained to be polished
strayed as it sank in water,
away from our interlacing hands,
away with the tides, undulating
inside lithe streamers of algae
suspended from the black
where I was, looking in,
a child again trying to sleep,
vying to compose the shattered
particles: white tips of light,
blue enamel lips of porcelain,
and the handle like a lost ear
falling forever. But what good
would this do? You could not
rise airward, only disintegrate
inside the shoals' smashing
waves, whipped up figurines
of silver froth breaking
and repeating in the broken
link of the archipelago--
like our unfinished remarks.

KAIKI BEACH

How necessary it is
to lose yourself
in tangles,

the seafoam
like torn lingerie
wrapping your shins

as you wade toward the shore
to the intermittent clicks
of worry beads

and staccato of cicadas.
The long laugh
of a priest

in a swath of black robe
shakes the pines
as he holds court in a taverna

under the white sail
tent, and kisses
a pale, pregnant woman

who cradles her belly
with one chafed
and sunburnt hand

while lifting
a glass of sparkling quinine
with the other,

toasting her mild pain.
The priest cuts into his filet
of white fish

anointed with drops of lemon
before he gives
his blessing

to the unborn baby.
And, here, a coiled snake
readies its strike

in the tide's aqua shallows
I tip-toe through
with the sun blazing on

my back, this hand
of God pushing me to
take a seat at His table,

be forgiven
that I swam with sharks
and took their seed,

which produced
days of waiting
for the end of emptiness.

I hear His words absolve
that I am a bearer
of lies as much

as truth, and so
I smile at Him
as if He were my own father

and peer down into a cup
of thick coffee
silted with deltas

the fortune teller reads--
her voice spilling
a gravel

of miseries
the corkscrew slice
of orange rind mocks,

stinging the eyes
with the disguise of tears.
The cacophony of children

recurs
at the draw of evening
inside the cascade of falling beads

lapped up by the current
of Kaiki Beach--
a crescent lip of moonlit sand--

when he whispers
through the muffle of the resinous
pines and dying laughs

in the kafenio
only love thyself,
stirring the knives in the uterus.