Grain for Bread, Grapes for Wine

] a book of poems [there]
among the scarves and trinkets
of the little shop –
after two days, some pages
already warped from sea-damp, dried salt.

Anchored between two Cycladic islands the boat sways,
June wind stings my wet skin
and I ask the skipper if he would read aloud to us –
page 26. Certain words I can pick out:
Kyklopas
Poseidonas [the angry god]
and *Ithaki*, of course
] and so on
] in words I cannot understand
] but want to hear in the language of those gods & heroes

The poet tells the traveler not to rush –
though Ithaka has grain for bread and grapes for wine.
Streams, good rains.
Instead [as the instructions go]:
amass your treasures in Phoenician ports,
wander – learning from the erudite
[he mentions Egypt]

but keep Ithaka always in your mind [somehow, anyways] –
Indulge is surely written there
between the lines.

And what of the weaver?
[the weaving wife] – by day imposing cosmic order
on the loom. By night, unthreading the woolen strands of weft
[to gain more time]
[to wait some more]

This is what the poet says: without *her* [the land]
the traveler would never have set out –
that *she* [the land] gave him the journey. That he should stay [away]
until Ithaka has nothing more to give.

Until there is nothing more [ ] to give [

My Mother Speaks of Our Plot

You can give it up, she says –
looking up from her French crime novel
and pocket dictionary – When the time comes.
Who will water the plants, keep the candles lit?

> The names are chiseled in slate:
> my father, my mother's parents, her aunt, her Oma.
> In the summer, we go to pull out errant weeds,
> bring the Jahrzeit candle, lay a pebble
> on the headstone edge.

I'm thinking about the silence there, like swaddling –
how the sounds that come through seem to arrive
from a distant place:

> branches of old pine shifting under the landings
> and leavings of sparrow and blackbird,
> the avian voices. Footsteps
> on the grid of gravel pathways.

But my mother is already somewhere else,
talking of a teacher she had in high school,
how she was told to underline each word looked up
in her dictionary, German to English.

I never dared –, my mother tells me.
It seemed wrong to write in a dictionary.
But now I am eighty.
Now I can.

Grounded

At first, I think it's the dog –
against the bedframe
trying to appease an itch.

Rhythmic cracks then take me
fully out of sleep:
radiator cover striking
at the fixture's edges.

The dog leaves her sleeping
cove beneath the bathroom
counter, looks at me –
searching for an answer
to the room's tilt and sway.

Outside, it still storms –
the wind complains.
Lightning sends its roots
across the black.

Plates of rock push and slide
along the Levant fault.
The earth being the earth.

And again, we are Paleolithic –
crouched around a fire.
Look for caves to shelter in,
use tools of bone. Know how
close we are to the ground.

Nineteen

She sleeps on a lounger by the pool. Deeply enough her untied bathing top has shifted. I check to see an arm still covers her – look at the pale curve of hip sloping towards the hollow where the last rungs of ribs begin. Undulations, I think, that have caused some trouble. She turns. Her suit bottoms leave little hidden. It isn't envy as I look at my niece by marriage – with her baffling quick view lip-syncs that fascinate, not least because she doesn't know the words – but something else. I stand, collecting books and glasses – scan the pool deck's theater: grandfather and older cousin, her brother, my husband and two sons. My going will leave her one. As I walk the path – three teenage boys jostling in the water – a sense of the undone trails behind. A shadow stalking. And I wonder, Should I wake her? Relations all, I know. It isn't peril but something else. I walk on then stop again, still unsettled: a shrugging off, an allegiance shirked. The shadow waits – figure of untold metamorphoses standing there. For her, I ask someone to cover nineteen with a towel.

On Passages (morning, evening)

I

Half-awake I wonder
about my mother – my father –
what they are doing,
where they are in the house / once more

I'm in the narrow
bed by the open window –

sticky branches of Pittosporum
outside the glass / marine layer breathing

through the open crack.

It takes moments to remember:
he's been gone 18 years –
she is 7,000 miles away / and I

am the parent here.

II

3 cargo ships moored
along a slant line
recede towards the horizon.

The sea is a still blue slate under cloud-cover.

In the grey stratus, a split
of orange flame –
the light bleeds out.

On the water
a trail flares pink then fades
as I watch.