

PRELUDE: VOLCANO

Let me speak it to you in a whisper
I am like a volcano
that has blown itself
out of the water

my long stony curve
my melancholiac cliffs
a strip of old hard
exoskeleton

the blue Aegean flows
in and out of me
the tourists come, oh they come
to stand where the lava flew

to imagine how
the earth roared showed teeth
bucked and heaved
to look for an hour

at where the tidal wave began
that destroyed Atlantis
and created a myth
a green good world

you remember

A woman looked at my poem. What is a volcano? She wanted to know. What makes you like a volcano? What would the world be like without the myth of Atlantis?

the volcano is a crack in the earth
the volcano is a bulge over a crack
a fault line runs under it

something terrible happens
and the magma
coughs out

hot beauty
thick and magnificent rage
so what if afterward

everything is dead

When I was a child
I was an island
a small round bushy island
inside me were many

roots, rocks, ores,
flowings and crevasses wrinkled
pushing like joy, like fear's thin
fluids, like love's neediness

maybe too much
and somehow they all turned
to anger and for years
the lava poured and poured

righteously
destroying all
in its path
righteously

roaring

FUGUE: MOTHER

Honor your mother
what if it commanded only that
honor your mother

against nature which
bids you flee her
honor while despising

while wrestling free
while avenging
this unasked for

gift of life

Unasked for disappointing hateful life
it is the mother's fault

we fall from her space into the world
webs of organs helpless

what a pity she does not eat us
and be done with it

rats do
lions do

in dry times

Although I have put an ocean between us
still do you know how I lie awake at night
the eye in my right palm pictures you
sitting amid your litter, feet buried
by accumulated jars of buttons,
glasses lost beneath a decade of bank statements
and funny poems, penciled in margins

like the tiniest of insects,
hands folded under your chin, staring
at nothing, preparing to be blind
and helpless, for fifty years
it has tortured me that I cannot save you from madness
and that I do not love you enough

what is enough
nothing is enough

Someone named *he* has organized it all
the absent mathematician
the endless one
or so they say
those who believe in logic and reason
a world of equations where nothing is wasted

it may be as they suppose

what I find in the foreground is *you*
monologist, mistress of futility
loudly denouncing your many enemies
boiling through cycles of fat and thin
nervously sorting changeless debris
rags, furniture, rotted steaks
killing and saving, more or less at random,
beetles, roaches, flies,
writing illegible puzzles
dead fish crammed in your ceiling

You always wanted *me* to be *your* mother
now you do it by supposed accident
you dare to call me your mother
I who am merely your irresponsible daughter
without shame you exhibit your toothless face

blindness and helplessness
selfishness memory loss
stinking incontinence
whether I wish or not
it is you, isn't it
I must cherish
mama
maya
even if winter sleet assaults the windows
like urine, hisses *too late, too late*
I myself must decide it's not too late.

Mom, reach into
your barrel of scum-coated blessings.
Find me one.

THE YEARNING

Not until the lower world
was made perfect was the other world also made
perfect . . . and it is thus the yearning from below
which brings about the completion above.

—The Zohar

and so I am reading the zohar
and they are so splendid these old rabbis in their splendor
and their words are blazing light sparks gushing springs
and their hopes are palaces pomegranate trees perfumes ascending

glorious
but as for me
their gates stand closed
fastened against me

what must I do outside here
shake the latches and wail, they are deaf
mount a lawsuit against them, they are expert lawyers
scratch my scabs go on a hunger strike

forget it they own the cameras, oh my beloved
how long before you tell them: let me in
tell them I am your bride

from **PSALM**

You have made everything wondrous after its kind
the x molecule hooks the y molecule

mountains rise with utmost gravity
snow upon their shoulders

a congress of crows circulates through the maize
its sheen brightens through a breezeless morning

the ribbed leaf a spot of scarlet floats
on the shivering creek

each single thing so excellent in form and action
whether by chance by excitement by intention

you draw along a dappled path the wren
to her nest, the fledglings cry, the lions flow

rhythmically toward the antelope, the butterfly
flicks linen wings, the galaxies

propagate light in boundless curves
past what exists as matter, as dust

you have done enough, engineer
how dare we ask you for justice

you who lay justice in the hands of Cain
you who lean on the crutches of Law

THEODICY: A DIALOGUE

*The spot of black paint
in the gallon of white
makes it whiter*

*so the evil impulse
is part of you
for a reason*

what reason

greater wilder holiness

So perhaps you want us to understand
it throbs also in you
like leavening

you want us to love that about you
even if you pray that your attribute of mercy
may overcome your attribute of wrath

you want us always to love the evil also
the death-wish also
the bread of hate

because we are your image
*confess you prize
the cruel theater of it*

it follows then
the love of suffering
the suffering of love
that too is a spectacle to you
or do you feel it too
God, do you
feel it too

CALL AND RESPONSE

The Mother: Please, *please*
I can't see well
reassure me with your touch

or a tender word
the shade of a wing
or just *one* jay feather

or a snail shell, please visit me
please call me, please listen
to my story

The Poet: And the rhododendrons arrive, and so
you've survived another winter
shaky through clotted retinas

slowly reduced to one or two chopped letters
at a time mother you have spent
a lifetime reading only

to learn what words do not accomplish
though when I phone
today you say

there was so much sun
you sat outside

The Mother: I could read again

you remind me you were a wild one
you used to beat up the boys on your block

you were teacher's pet, you won prizes for poetry
everyone said you had beautiful eyes

you tell your neighbor I am your moon and stars
you are upset the plumber stole your purse

so I drive over and find it
on the counter among the flies