

The Occupant Imagines the House as a Great Fish

It has already swallowed a century, each year a silver iridescent scale. For eight, she has lived in its belly, slightly beyond her means. How well she knows its creaks and currents of air, its slow, digestive rhythms. How many mornings she has stood behind the large, glassy eyes that stare impassively down on the park, observing the junkies and dog walkers awash in airy sunlight; and how many evenings felt herself sinking incrementally into the still and liquid night.

Sometimes she imagines the former occupants: the long dead whose bones are coral, or the others—dense spirits skimming the surface in narrow boats. She'd like to ask them a few things. *Why did you wallpaper the ceiling? Do you grieve for your body?* But their words, dissolved in air, can find no purchase here, and she is not yet proficient in the dialects of silence.

Still, there is no ill will. They come, untenable shadows, and go, stirring the boughs of tall firs. Today too the sun appears, birds call across the surface of the morning. *Song of dissolution, song of light.* She turns from the window as the thought rises—*the house is a fish, and I*—then glides into shadow, softly as the back door opening, closing.

Conch

She found me, a lacquered mouth
pressed to the lace hem of the sea,
turning fitfully in her dark arms
like a man going off to war.

Having no man of her own
she brought me home, held me
cool and hard to her ear. The things
I whispered cannot be told!

Now she is big with them.
I sit on her desk, trumpeting
my silence, pretending to be
a souvenir from Belize.

And she, cloud-fast, frequent
flyer, how could she know, ere
or since, she would sit tethered
to the kitchen table

scribe to the garrulous objects
of her household: these bodies,
heft and hum of the living world
that spins us here and gone—

the sunlight catching us
in its gold glance,
the shadow of night
letting us go.

Lingerie

Tidally
morning and evening, we slide
into light—

sheer tentacles of stockings
black cuttlefish of negligee

her fingers seining our salt sleep,
these bras, scalloped in rows

the scuttling, four-clawed garter belt.
Soft mollusk, chitin-less

what would she be without this
borrowed armor

these fabricated fins of silk and lace,
her tender lures

and stunning darts! And how many
swimmers, their strokes

strong and sure, have we pulled
down, held breathless

under the waves and carried in—
alive and

gasping on the delicate strand
of this world?

Matchbook

We are not the world,
we are the content of the world:
hazard and illumination—
desire, consummation, ash.

And what you fear you must
apportion. We stand at attention,
twenty redheaded soldiers, a small company
awaiting your command:
one for the candle on your birthday cake
one to ignite a forest
one to spark Revolution
two for the chafing dish, the candelabra,
one to burn your bridges and another
for the shared cigarette after.

By all means, close cover
before striking. Hold us closely
in your two cupped hands.
Wherever we march cinders
into history. You'll know us
by our sulfurous traces—

smoke of your own days rising
behind you: last night
at the restaurant; the bright ships
of Carthage, burning.

The Occupant Considers Poisoning the Ants

For days she has watched them, one, a few, now a living pavement of black stones, crossing the white-tiled continent of the bathroom floor. They are smelling the way home to their nation in the masonry, to their bulbous queen, the molecular limit of being. To her they bring news of another world: food and crushing danger. The woman has been reading about the ants, how they forage far for what sustains them, go down into the earth again and again to bring up their dead. She unseals the box, studies the instructions in English and Spanish. *Ant grammar*, she reflects, *has no first person singular*. She applies the lethal drop to the paper with the red bullseye and sits down on the edge of the tub. Soon, one will smell the delectable poison, mark its place, and carry it back to the nest, her joy a fresh fuse of atoms burning behind her, the news smeared urgently on her sisters' bodies. Sooner still, the woman will retrieve the target, return it to the box, and close the flap. In some countries, she knows, this passes for mercy.