

mermaids need to feed their children

by

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*Dedication*

for the child kneeling on the steps of an old town, his small accordion eclipsing the clamour of my silent passing.

*Epigraphs*

The tender words we said to one another are stored in the secret heart of Heaven. One day like rain they will fall and spread, and our mystery will grow green over the world.

–Rumi (trans. Andrew Harvey)

And I

Am the arrow,

The dew that flies

Suicidal, at one

With the drive the red

Eye, the cauldron of morning.

Ariel,

–Sylvia Plath

The heart that breaks open can hold the whole universe.

Active Hope,

–Joanna Macy

fairground

vibrantly drowsy, the dense gleam  
of the air seems dazed, weighed down  
by a blinding jungle of lights  
and the creaking fizz of candy apple.  
coins grind like copper  
tongues between the crowded steel teeth  
of jostling slot machines, rupturing

the jingle and judder  
and jolt to a bolt  
of a bronze beast,  
mane flung back in gathering  
wildness and sewn into static  
urgency. the beast dowses a cloud

of swings like flames with the galloping  
torrent and whirl  
of its hooves, swings  
with their pregnant seats screaming  
in a vast acrylic  
blur. a bursting

kaleidoscope of hands  
like butterflies, their shunning  
of handles swirling in an uproar  
of waves revealing  
candy floss. speed conjures

distance like smoke  
as it snakes and clusters  
around air,

until the whole world  
seems breathless.

an offering

\*Fling the emptiness out of your arms  
To add to the spaces we breathe;  
Maybe the birds will feel the expansion of air  
In more intimate flight.

Duino Elegy I,  
Rainer Maria Rilke.

how can I wring such rapture from the air  
with silence so stormy and rampant  
in the wildflowers of the tied sky's wounds?

the clamour of so much darkness  
hurtles from the howling heart  
of the shy sky, a harsh surge  
on hushed green ground.

the furled bird of my own heart ruptures,  
a scarlet hurl of wingbeats  
clawing the chained sky free,  
feeding on its impending ashes.

from a vantage point high above the sea

\*Long is the journey, short is the memory...

Sappho.

my heart will fold its wings  
around an ocean who is shaking  
the wind  
out of her hair:

a sea remembering  
an aspect of my pulse  
in glass, the ashes  
of last night's storm  
worn down to rugged  
smoothness by the lazy  
rifling of waves:

my heart is their phoenix,  
its throat shattering  
with a clamorous afterbirth  
of fine, hushed song  
as though it had caught  
the swift dusk sky,  
making the teetering moon rustle  
her glow in shy  
defiance.

transitions

I. the boy in the blue bikini

his slender figure seems  
to gleam, dark  
against the down of the soaring waves  
from which he is chasing  
the towering sky.

the boy's shadow rushes  
out of the wind's claws  
and is hurled  
towards the brink  
of a tooth of Earth lodged  
in the sea's flank.

his limbs are bright and hard like coral  
from gales and roar of sea-polish  
on smooth wood board,  
his spine a bare arch  
for the thundering ocean in its growling  
cloud of small stone wheels.

just below the arrow gull's-wings sky-line  
of his shoulder blades, a cloth horizon  
stretches, wild and softly rampant  
across his narrow back, clambering  
around to two blue wings  
above his ribs which cling,  
unwilling to release

him as his saddling  
of another wave whirls his shape  
in the wind's arms:  
torso clenched, neck flexed,  
chest and chin and cheek-bones chafed  
to keen angles - the slim, twin  
trunks of his raised arms surging  
and flashing with the lustre  
of a starfish in the dazzling rising thrill  
of a moon's defiance.

## II. the girl in the pink swimming trunks

with the glassy shyness  
of shingle, her bare curves  
quiver, the musty murmurs  
from the sand climbing and clinging  
to her like ivy; she wonders fleetingly

why the blaze  
of beach and pier is mining  
her feet

for pride. shaking herself, she shimmies up the rust-scented railing  
until she perches, arms flexed  
over her head  
like a wave.

after one held breath, a shiver  
of wind ruffles  
pink cotton, soft  
with specks of salt  
around her knees, wrinkling  
the fabric like slowly surfaced  
skin -

until she plunges  
with the moon  
into the liquid magnetism  
of ocean tumult.

dusted with broken

waves, she is parting  
the ripening shallows now, and as she reaches  
the spacious shimmer  
of the shore, a gust breathes  
a sifting of wild into her hair, and her untangled  
laughter rouses the sun to mount  
a haggard ecstasy of high-tide sky.

earthward

the fleeting hooves of dusk's shyness  
set alight the silence  
of the sky's leaves,  
gathering and scattering their own swiftness  
like blue ashes. through the quickening  
of their blaze, earth's wings hatch  
an ocean, blossoming  
into a moon who rises  
and draws the wind away  
from the sky — bearing it earthward  
in a bright eclipse  
of wildflowers.

Catherine wheel

it springs from its crouch on the calloused  
ground, ploughing the air in a whirl  
of readiness for sowing light  
to breed the pregnant laughter  
of the crowd's chimera.

my tiny toe tips burrow  
in the gnarled grey bracken.  
I worry at the stubborn distance lodged  
between my night-numbered fingertips  
and the galloping spokes,  
wind brushing past like a hurried  
stranger muttering that I am too short  
to touch the rim.

I imagine myself  
high enough to skim the static  
pouring from the loudspeakers, the crowd seething  
on the wide brow of the lawn,  
the guy leering and shrieking  
at the lick of flames preying  
on his broadsheet skin, his scrunched  
tissue paper flesh.

I imagine myself  
ringed by the wheel, hands rubbed raw  
from gripping the sides, a whirl of red  
against the whine of the jerking air  
as I hurtle into gnawed oblivion:

a bird child who flew  
too close to the sun,  
and clattered with it noiselessly

into waves gaping at the feathered wake  
of its swoop under the fire  
in a dusty dazzle of wax.

ravaging

the shore's shyness ripens, bolts,  
its silence suicidal, climbing  
to slit its throat  
in the ocean's shriek.

armed with the mounting scarlet  
of their clamorous Eucharist  
of hush,  
the gnashing shallows shrink  
to shattered amber.

bleeding shingle blossoms, writhes,  
suckling the vanishing shimmer  
shielding the tide's wild.

catharsis will surge in snapshots

pills will pilfer and hoard

me, the once coarse

Braille of their packaging eroded

by hoarse hours urging

fingertips. one thin flap

unfolding outwards, the first

sheet slithering from its cardboard

sheath, each small oblong

bulging with readiness

for drowning slowly

in my throat like a warm, worn

stone. the first sharp crack

of plastic, the first tremble

of a tablet

in my dry right palm.

fingers gripped

in the grooves of a cold

tap, clawing harder

at my wrist's firm

turning, anchoring

rope burns. the growl

of the tap's blood climbing, glancing

close to the rim

of a glass mountainous

in its high blankness. the tap spinning

once more, quicker and clockwise  
this time — dripping  
a small fleet  
of instants longer — hard  
against the sink's inside, stealing  
scorchingly cool into stainless  
steel like regiments  
of wear. the pill,  
with its two segments split

by one straight gash, hovering  
at my lips' clamped  
bud: a butterfly wound  
tight in clenched, white  
wings, remembering red  
as a rusty rumble rushing  
to squat inside parched  
eyes. the pale tablet  
passing through my hot mouth's barren  
battle-ground masquerading  
as a rose, its sliding deviously

erect. no taste yet  
but the vast thrill  
of water as my figure

waits, brittle  
and waterlogged  
on the shuddering edge  
of the bed. pill after pill tossing itself  
down the well of me,

with the scattered absent-mindedness  
of pebbles, as if to test  
depth. I will flit

from the dull tolling  
of darkness peeling and peeling  
from my chest's flesh

to counting blades  
in a charred field,

to how long it might take  
for someone to notice  
missing butterflies, their white  
wings clenched around stiff forms  
like closed curtains.

a note discovered in the fist of absence

an archeologist will sift  
through the mounds of absence  
to reach his fist  
and excavate this note  
from his soft claws, to read

of a sky's calm trembling  
from a blue that brimmed  
with all the glassy  
dazzle of rain's swift  
shyness:

the sky a womb  
for the skeletal air  
who, shaking and tightening to shield  
the flood of me, a brittle  
butterfly, from the heat  
of its own vast  
clamour

to slink into my leap which summoned  
the dusty water  
to sculpt me into smoke  
until the ocean's pollination  
of my ashes  
and the rush  
of the moon surged  
moth-like into my monsoon blaze.

aftermath 1

this is the kind of silence  
that gathers force like dust and water,  
and makes stones shriek  
like rivers.

her smoke

shuffles, sheepish  
over the crouched forms  
of cobblestones, clinging  
to deepening grains  
of tumbling sunlight  
and other scales  
of summer.

smoke, that hunched, grandfatherly  
girl in slippered  
feet, with misty hair  
through which grey walls  
cluster in huddles  
like crows.

smoke tosses herself  
in a frantic beating  
of chattering lights  
like wings, her dark beak hauling

the stubborn sky into a blur  
which burrows it  
for space

to writhe, like an avalanche  
uncoiling, or a forest  
climbing out from wildfire,  
drawing and hoisting timber down  
from clouds.

refusal

boats like tumours bristle,  
shrivelling the sea's chafed vulva  
to a blaze  
with the crowing haul  
of their plummeting  
anchors.

plumed with wounds from the teeth  
of the raw horizon,  
the moon is wrestled  
from the naked rage of defiant ocean,  
who draws her to a surge

from beneath ships, shattering masts  
against the vanishing silence  
of ravished cliffs.

what would a stone say

the ocean's swollen tolling  
devours my cupped palms,  
until its laughter, crystallised to stone,  
nests there, raucously smoothed,  
with the shy defiance  
of a starfish straddling  
the sullen shallows  
and the sun's howl.

my hands,  
wrinkled like something ancient  
or just born,  
wonder how something so wise  
can be tossed at gulls,  
before dashing  
harmless and silent  
back under the sea's breath.

where is the throat  
of all those lost millennia?  
what would a stone say  
if it could shriek?

avalanche 1

I writhe, rear, rush  
from the grip of the inky quickening  
of glaciers: coiled  
in Earth's mountainous  
throat, my weight ruptures  
their waters, which shatter

to a clatter of snow-drifts  
studded with wingbeats

as wind wrestles smoldering  
white out of ocean, its shyly  
frenzied scatter dusting  
my shunning  
of the petrified sky

in a wild premonition  
of ashes.

I, Medusa

I have rifled through the aerial silks  
of my own roar,  
handholds flashing past  
my clamorous impending  
through the shy air as I mount  
and dash to nest  
in the moon's dive:

I bear snakes like children,  
and my skull is gnawed from shunning  
their surge as I plunge  
into tumultuous blue  
as I shatter a dazzle  
of sky flesh  
and surface.

my eyes are lustful butterflies,  
suckled by the magnetic  
nectar of all motion  
which sharpens their bright filaments  
to carve their haggard silencing.

from a plane in mid-air

I think of sky-diving with no parachute  
from this rupturerer of wingbeats,  
how long it might take  
for my hurl  
through the sky's throat  
to fissure  
her roar  
to silence. distance crumbles  
the growl of the vast bird's prowl  
over the clenched air's barren flank  
as the void is severed  
by the livid surge  
of the ground. suckled by the Earth,  
I will shatter  
into blossom  
to reignite her radiance.

flowers

surging, these sisters to the stern air bruised with shell-shocked butterflies  
coax aside wise soil  
to pollinate the sun.

vanishing

a gale of sudden butterflies  
like bells tolls blue,  
wounding the silence  
of the clouds, summoning rain  
from the patience  
of scattered, acrid vistas  
still shaking from their last eruption.

rebellion

there is a raw enlivening  
of dust, time clings  
to the world like soot, and the wind  
has a way  
of shifting so it can be hard  
to tell what is clamped  
behind the teeth it thrusts out  
sometimes, briefly, without  
warning.

ice writhes  
and slides out  
to erupt in a frenzy  
of black ocean, shying away  
from its own shell in dense jet  
torrents.

shining green angels  
fracture,  
fissure,  
shatter  
and crumble to dust  
in the arms chained with other arms  
around their trunks in vast  
rebellion against this shrieking sawing  
of hearts, this breeding  
of sparks bursting  
through bark in a parody  
of blossom, each

a tiny, charred, gleaming  
bird.

our orb is shaking with blaze  
for her vanishing  
shield of blue, for her cherishing  
of rhythm around a star, her darkening  
song, shuddering  
beneath our heave  
of rivers and seas to cage  
the bleeding of dry  
ground.

time is peeling away,  
its impending distance  
rushing, razor-soft and wingbeat-mute  
like muffled bells.

a diver wrenched a stingray

the ocean's howl burst  
through the wound in her throat  
as he surfaced, glistening  
with the pulsing of the sacrifice,  
the taut line of his spine's notched surge  
birthing spires, battered  
by the sun's bright synapses.

hands raised, triumphant,  
proffering the writhing glow of frenzied catch  
to encroaching storms. turning  
oblivious with pride  
from the brink of the sky  
against harsh wood  
he let flesh shriek.

the sea reared, heaving  
with another slaughter,  
her shining avalanche  
as a blade's emerging  
plundered the sting, pitch it  
like wizened sunlight  
into waves.

avalanche 2

coiled in the womb  
of the sun's jaws,  
I slip from my clamped leash  
as they simmer open  
to riddle the cowering darkness  
with a hurl of dawn.

I surge the absence of butterflies, tapping  
the shy cocoon of the sky  
to pollinate the lustre  
of my dazed unravelling.

flood warning

twelve bells swell

like throats raw

with the hoarse stillness

of a winter morning.

they have been cast,

sly and swift

like fishing nets, catching

the whole sky's tolling

as it races its own embers

to tangle in their tight, bright

mesh cluttered

with silence. landing with the brittleness

of clouds, wombs of rain

nest, dark birds swollen

and silent

like an old church

bell; awakening

rivers, they strip armfuls of time

like nectar

away from flowers.

a storm's impending

the sawing of clouds  
in their hurtling blur with a shriek  
like pregnant boulders:  
those vast hunks of shaking sky  
drawing mountainously  
to a bolt of agile darkening.

and now, the years are riddled  
with the lost laughter  
of icecaps:  
the ocean tolls  
like the wings of a bloated angel;

the storm gathers  
the wild shy slyness  
of its heart  
with a river's frightened envy  
of its own twin ocean,  
whose sheltering of boulders

bears a black glass marble  
rifling through the silence  
of the hemorrhaged air  
as its impending  
becomes woman.

silence, that kind of lingua franca taught in schools, who is always becoming woman

the shell of the sky glows open,  
and silence, its pearl  
of raw defiance, weighs  
a storm's impending  
in its own deep lustre.  
shrivelling distance ruptures  
her to dust,

and she flits  
in small bright shavings  
over stormy boys  
and inky girls  
hunched over their rows  
of wizened wooden work-tops;  
and children too whose loneliness would shun  
the dual cacophonies of uniforms with skirts or ties,  
if she were not shimmying up their throats  
to the hems  
of their sewn tongues.

silence, that kind of lingua franca  
taught in schools,  
who is always becoming  
a woman:

an old crone  
lowering herself down  
from the eaves of the sky's mouth  
to weave in the whistling patience

of her wicker rocking chair,

her plumage thunderously radiant  
with clustering years  
which steal the shelter  
of her frame:  
they are the scrolls of her,  
these seams, with their lightning shyness  
like a sky fissured  
by a storm's catharsis.

she, like an ebony angel,  
polyglot, her wingbeats  
mounting the sky's trunk.

loneliness, a huntress

she lowers her nets,  
letting the ocean bow  
those strange blossomings  
of nylon gossamer  
pregnant with moon  
like nectar. the huntress shimmies

moth-like over waves, returning  
through the flowering darkness, shaking  
with the impending pollen  
of ensnared light —

until entangling with mesh  
quickness her song's  
own bright darkening like a thorn's  
shy suckling of blood  
from a child's first wonder.

ablaze

a shy typhoon  
of angels  
smolders past

my watchful window-panes,  
their wise glass shaking  
to a wide rustle  
in its patient frame.

I remember as if with ashes  
the rush of foliage and bark's darkness  
into sparks

like a fleeing undergrowth  
of birds,  
of angels;

and now, all these sudden acres  
of flight and silence.

worn glass yields  
oneness with flames, drawing my heart  
to roar through their throats in a rush  
of hushed skies, dazzling  
my breath. I lean out, reaching

for armfuls of ocean  
chained to rain, in each  
a handful of sky wrung  
dry, rung clamorously

by wizened window-panes  
in a plaintive frame.

aftermath 2

this is the kind of silence  
who gathers force,  
setting stones alight  
to make them shriek  
like the memory  
of rivers,  
as its vast impending strives  
to become woman.

funeral rites

nothing to bury

with a felled

future

but the shrieks

of splintered

tree-trunks, a furnace pouncing

from its crouch on the pealed

ground to shatter

the wise brown bow

of their ringed

spines.

nothing to bury

with a felled

future

but shorn

boulders, the fleeing

of oil like blood from mountains

drowning in shackled

air.

nothing to bury

with a felled

future

but thundering shells  
fashioned like the raging  
eggs of bulging war birds  
spawning in a howling  
hurl

of clouds  
whose proud devouring  
breeds bleached wilderness  
in hauling down

the sky whose dashing  
claws hoarse oceans  
out of being.

nothing to bury  
with a felled  
future.

spring

*And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,*

*And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly...*

*And they were behind us, reflected in the pool;*

*Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.*

Four Quartets, Burnt Norton

–T. S. Eliot.

five red fledglings shiver

a promise of foliage

like a small, fleeting

flock of memories

of wind.

below, winter's blood peers,

shy and green like wingbeats

through the feathery crinkles

of last night's frost, coaxing it

to splinter

dustily beneath the paws

of dawn as she crumbles softly

across the sky and melts like glass.

flakes once perched

on the creaking thinness

of branches have scattered, chased

by four hatchlings

and a frightened night.

silence now.

one last bird falls.