

Dear Bride

How I loved your swan hiss and screech, your electric hair. I loved the ragged strips of cloth that bound your fragile arms, as if you could not trust your own brittle skin. I loved the stitches on your throat, the snap of your head, your bloodlessness. The way you rose,

a drawbridge across a moat, the straight steel bars of you, the sheet-draped plank of your body—none shall pass, none shall enter here. To breathe again, after your time underground. To wake to lightning and the triumphant

cries of men. Everything sharp corners and polished metal. Everything harder than you. Pallid, alone, you could not close your eyes—How could you be expected to believe any creature who called you friend? Still, he was the only one who knew how fully you belonged to the dead.

Who let you down the first time? Who lowered you, lowered his body to the fresh-turned earth above you? What kind of man would let you go so easily? And oh, God, what if the world refuses to disappear again beneath you?

The Greatest Sin is to be Unconscious  
*Carl Jung*

Then let me sin, let me sink into sand dampened  
with the wash of sleep, let it cover me, enclose me,  
become me. Let my breath be deep  
and long, let it fill me with dreams, let it lead me  
through uncharted channels. Let my skin  
warm, let my muscles ease, let me give myself  
to carelessness. Let me drift, let me come  
to nothing for a while. Let nothing come to me, let  
a hush move with the seeping certainty of water, let me  
erode into demolished, disintegrating abandon.  
Let my eyelids drop and let them not  
be lifted. Let my shoulders burden themselves with  
sin, let them drift down to the bottom of the sea,  
let them anchor me to the reef. Let my arms become  
separate creatures, let my legs dislocate  
with release, tendons loose, ligaments undone,  
knees and hips unjointed. Let my bones  
return to sand and stone, let my blood be  
salted water, let me float, unrepentant,  
near the blue on blue horizon.

## Shore

Stand a minute, the pulling-under of the waves  
receding, sand piling over your toes, then your feet,  
anchoring you but taking you under, an intrepid  
but hapless explorer in that old jungle movie  
we watched the day it rained, the one who sank  
and sank until just his helmet rested on the surface  
of the quicksand, and then his fear-pale hand  
splashed up and pulled it down with him.

Perhaps it is a little like that, this clam you are  
becoming—the pearled damp flesh, the tiny  
tube for breath, the shore caving in above you,  
the intrusion of the baffling sun eclipsed, a child  
running above you then stopping to dig a while  
at a watery hole to the other side of the world.

Sonnet on a Line from Thom Gunn

I have not crossed your mind for three weeks now.  
If I could say the same of you...your cheek  
that did not bristle me out of a sleep,  
the way you didn't come, like sleep. Or how  
I didn't wait for you all night—a lie.  
At least you taught me to be good at those.  
My God, the things each of our bodies knows—  
the hollows left when love-knots come untied.  
But if my name escapes your sleeping mouth  
and if she, also dreaming, rolls away  
and leaves you lying bare against the night,  
know this: I, too, lie in your naked house.  
I wear forgetfulness like clothes all day.  
I, too, pretend that I prefer the light.

## One More For Your Baby

He is the song that won't stop playing  
in your ear, a sad, easy song about  
smoky bars and setting 'em up again  
and love gone wrong at the watery bottom  
of a very tall glass. He doesn't know  
the word no, or maybe you've forgotten  
to say it again this time. He's the one  
more for the road man, he's the drink  
you shouldn't take, but you're too far  
gone to convince yourself to leave it  
alone. One more taste, you always think. Just one.  
An insinuation of whiskey melting  
with the ice cube on your tongue, that's all.  
A brief episode that repeats and repeats,  
he is your own little lyric gone on too long,  
in a key just half a step too deep for you,  
but you always end up low enough to meet him.  
And there he is, just before closing.  
It's quarter to three and he's humming  
about being a kind of poet and knowing  
the routine and his lips are so close  
to your skin, so close, and you know  
already how he will taste and what  
he will want and where, the secrets  
his skin hides and where he burns and how  
to make him sing, and he knows you haven't  
found a way to drown that torch,  
not all the way, not so far gone  
that he can't still put a match to it.