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Poems

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Abstract

THE POOL, DANAE, CICADAS, MOTHS, WEEDY SEA-DRAGON, CLOCK MUSEUM

Diane Fahey

THE POOL

He has given her this room of mirrors, in which she is bored;
she may speak to him only when he speaks to her.

He spends most of his time by the pool. What is it he sees,
staring down at its tiled floor – some classical coin

with shimmering bronze face? He is as beautiful as a dolphin
but never swims. She often does. She likes the splashing cry

of the water as her long arms slice through vivid green.
Why does he never look at her? He is always looking down –

even into his glass as they sit in the evening by the pool.
'Have you had a nice day?' (he stirs and pokes his ice);

'...a nice day?' she echoes, desolate.

Oh, but she loves him!

Once she swam the pool's whole length to surprise him,

curving up to where he gazed soulfully, teardrops pocking
the chlorine. At first he did not see her face, then,

when she was almost out of breath – but still smiling –
those clear eyes glazed with shock and he looked away.

She did not hear the slapping of her feet on concrete
as she walked inside then dripped up the long, soft stairs

to her room. 'With only mirrors to keep me company
I shall waste away, waste away...' she thought,

but could not say – as usual, the words stuck in her throat.
And she curled into herself, hiding from all those faces.

Stretched out flat by the pool, he too loved and wasted,
had not even sensed her walking away, her stifled sigh.

DANAE

Pennies from heaven –
a celestial dew!

Artists show your garments
conveniently askew...

With immaculate conceptions
there's so little to do –

you just lie there pretending
you're looking at the view.

Not being raped but being rained on,
it's difficult to sue.

Should you sleep with an umbrella
in case he tries to renew

your acquaintance with a brief
shower or two?

CICADAS

Holes pock the ground;
husks cling to stucco,
spine the lilac trunk;

in a whirr of cellophane
small zeppelins veer up
towards the tops of trees.

Sometimes their song
is a razor strop rasp
back and forth over the mind,

at others, patience
in tension with longing.
In mid-spring, their

climbing voices
promise heat, sex, death –

an iridescent throb

like a benign nerve;
an image beyond reach
provoking memory.

Befriending me, one covers
cheek, nose, ear
with ticklish tracks,

invades my hair.
three amber gems stud
the velvet between its eyes,

so mildly red. Close up,
I see the light they hold
and two black pinpoints,

then lift the cicada
back to earth and slip indoors –
enveloped still by that

high-pitched chant once
nurtured at the roots.

MOTHS

Soft, almost unseeing sentinels,
they wait without purpose on walls,
in cupboards, ready to be disembodied,
like candle flames, by a finger-pinch.

As cupped hands open to outer air,
they fidget, cling – do they know
how to be saved? Some prefer
to grow brittle on curtains, silk fringes.

Yet, multiplying as if by thought,
they have their future strategies:
pupae wreathed inside lids, buff wrigglers
chiselling rice to webbed clumps.

Most are radiantly nondescript,

somewhere between a sheen
and a colour; others, bark paintings:
a geometric opulence.

Tonight, one climbs the shadow
of the lamp, flirts with
the twisted gold nerve that draws
dull mysteries to fulfilment.

WEEDY SEA-DRAGON

With something of a race-horse's
vigilance of eye, taut slenderness,

it moves just faster than
the speed of stagnation –

by drift, out of sheer necessity –
sips plankton through a straw,

sports outcrops of kelp
that ripple like tourney flags

as it flows nowhere – at one
with its milieu (how we know

that which we hide amongst);
subliminal flares of violet,

yellow, red, help it stay unseen...
Light fills a weightless body

found, sea-stripped, near sandy feet.
Ants circle eye-sockets, work at

a final cleansing: this innocent bone
patched with fish-skin,

its shape rhythmmed in an upbeat –
a gracefully complicated wave

poised between quietism
and a quirky valour.

CLOCK MUSEUM

Long-case clocks line ancient walls:
transformed trees; survivors proving time's
errant constancy. One strikes seven at four o'clock
with the certainty of tone that poets crave:
words dissolving in a sea of resonance.

Seismograph of oak; split Rorschach of walnut;
the honeyed shine of elm, crudely planed...
In leaf shapes, black trceries
track shadows over silver, point to
three straight cyphers that translate all hours.

Old clockmakers wished time to be
present to us, stand in drawing room or hall
breathing the air of our dramas – lofty yet
patient companions, benevolent totems,
whose faces can hold our gaze, take our measure.

The sombre ticking off of lives... As these
shapers of it knew, time works on weight –
gravitas of flesh and wood and metal,
all culled from earth to be embraced by light,
fall towards the darkness of new origins.