

*extracted from
Mother of pearl by Rose Flint*

MAKING SOMETHING STILL

On each train journey this winter I watch for the deer
to step from forest shadows into delicate light
where Christmas geese are folded on green ochre; there
the river runs black, cold as cut ice, perfect mirror.

If I let go the city handrail, open my throat like a thrush,
if I place leaves and moss inside my boots,
if I go to the official station and hand over my cards,
my phone, my keys and earrings, if I trust the route

I could still make something of this last light.
I would have to move silently between the white geese
sleeping heaped like white amaryllis, step slight
and empty over the icy bitten grass to enter

the clear early air, where the wary doe waits
to watch me close my eyes. Then I would be living
the lit green fuse, the wave and the particle, the poem,
the place where everything connects: the beginning.

NOW VOYAGER

I have seen a boat swim into the earth
floating through the tide race of green weather
letting go gracefully, unlacing into grass
each slow season another fathom down.

Timbers splintered by the quick wake
of may's milky spray, her hull has thinned
to the finesse of silk, grey as winter water;
her compass facing west, is seized by stone.

There is no mast raised now
no tree of dreams that swing to catch the wind
sheets of naked white that praise the sunlight
take the writing of each storm, each dawn.

She is no ocean-rover lading stores of amber;
she holds herself broken, open
her ribs are spars that lattice only light
her only freight a wren's egg laid on lichen.

Exchanging halls of salt for palaces of amethyst
she discovers in herself the roots of oak trees
and in the dark endless voyage beneath her keel
a crystal wheel of uncharted stars for solace.

SELKIE ON LLEYN

At the sea's rim, pink thrift like twists of organdie
are stowed in crevices of rock, frail breaths
on slately rain-faced stones
that mark the island's tessellated edge.

Five fathoms down the seal has made her own territory,
returns each year to come up close
to Spring seasons like this: small flowers,
a mizzle rain that mists the distant gorse
to blurred fire and beads the turf with melted glass.

In sun, the seal's dim pool will clear to turquoise
and she'll glide within her salted towers
wearing siren leopardskin, green to match her eyes;
now her eyes are thoughtful, huge and black as emptiness.
The water roils around her turns, dark weaves
blue and shadow, make her hidden, liquid, near.

We watch each other. I am mirrored, fractured
falling from the sky to dive headlong beside her
as all around me, streams of silver air
pull tighter, slide along my skin a seal's kiss:
the world is water, cold and alien on my lips.
In all this space, only the seal's eyes are human, promising.

As I turn away the glass betrays me and I
slip, slide towards her and the waves
until my fingers catch on flowers, latch into the rock

then she swims towards me, makes me choose.

ABOVE SAINT CYBI'S WELL

Saint Cybi's ravens are seeing-off marauding herring-gulls
in a black/white war inside the wind above
the towering beech trees. I'd always cast the seagulls
as the bad guys, its those hooked-back pre-historic wings
like flick-knives and how they've threatened me
in seaside alleys where the deli's leaving spilt an easy crust.

And seagulls have no wisdom myths attached like leashes
to their legs, connecting threads that tie us
bird to human heart. Seagulls are always bird and alien,
but Raven speaks our many-storied tongue: their druid voice
prophesies approaching death and rain that brings resurgence,
Raven is our helpful spirit-guide, our guardian and healer
and Raven is the Morrigan's vicious wartime pet
that feasts on dying sight. Ravens are one-eyed Odin's seers,
Memory and Thought and Raven is the Trickster.
Only anonymous long-drowned sailors are shut inside
a seagull's head; you can see them glare out resentfully
through those sea-cold yellow eyes, always fathoms under.

Raucous, elegant, the ravens float and wheel,
returning to their roost. There's good pickings for them here,
I count a dozen sheep skulls whiter than the loaves of quartz
that build the lowest walls of ancient huts half-lost
beneath the gorse. Enough to feed a family
nine times over nine. Here, in this high place, wind starves
against stone and the silver-sheeted sea
is hammered over distance by the cold, to lie as still as death
or enchantment, and as devious. Oh love, who told you
it was better to stumble blindly up the mountain
to die alone, than to stay and fight
for another hour in the raw beauty of the air?

Sometimes it seems that nothing has a plan.
Its all tumbled anyhow, like this mossy rockfall,
like those dead brown leaves rolled inside the heart's cave
of a striped-out ewe's carcass, like the moody sea.
I can't answer any of the questions. I can only watch pat-
terns
forming in the air as the great black birds soar and swoop
the edge of life searching out the little hunted deaths,
the failures of breath or mothering. If I stay here longer
miracles of warm sun and basking snakes might happen
or I could freeze forever into the wheezy hollow
of my hurting chest where my energy is turning into
dust.
Either way, there will still be ravens here, nesting in tall
trees,
shadow wingspans circled on the wind. Yesterday I did
not see the way their presence altered light. Nor what
would heal me.