

THE DOOR IN THE FOREST



THE DOOR IN THE FOREST

Erika Mumford

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Drawings and cover painting by Daphne Mumford

**for DAVID
and our children:
STEPHEN, PETER
JEREMY, SUCHITRA**

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Drawings and cover painting
by Daphne Mumford.

*Diana in the woodes green
Luna that so bright doth sheen,
Proserpina in Hell.*

—John Skelton

GARLAND OF LAURELL

I
TRAVELING LEFTHANDWISE

PASSING THROUGH

It was still early when we left the road
 sparkling with morning sun
 and took the path that brought us
 to this coast. I remember
 how the mist came down.

Stones huge as ancient gods
 rose up before us
 ringing us round. You stooped
 and picked a small wild orchid.
 We passed through

and came to cliffs,
 upended granite, mist
 boiling, the crash of unseen waves.
 Our lips salty our hair
 streaking our cheeks.

We threw on bird skins,
 long grey feathers
 curving black-tipped wings
 exultant beaks. How the wind
 lifted us to hang in the white air

to swoop among the cliffs
 their jagged teeth their
 perilous updrafts. Our eyes
 piercing the cloud saw starfish
 and succulent sweet urchins.

On a broad ledge we rested. Feathered masks
 dropped down. Caressing beaks
 were lips again.
 We slept
 and woke to sun.

SHAMAN: for Malcolm

He comes in the spring,
spilling his wares
from embroidered bags
and leather pouches:
bracelets of ash wood,
elm chip puzzles, a face
peering out from a hood of bark.
On his fingers are rings
of twisted bloodroot.

Wood finds its way
to his hands, drawn
by the shape-shifter's art
and desire for metamorphosis.
In his pockets lie remnants
of a forest that stretched
to where the ice begins, trees
that were saplings when
the great hunt ended.

He tells of a grim winter,
bobcat tracks in the snow,
and Lucifer the raven
dead of pneumonia. He wears
no animal mask
or cloak of bluejay feathers,
yet for days after he leaves
I find scraps of his art
between pages of books and under
the sofa cushions: mouse bones
carved with glyphs, willow whistles,
and in the potted fern,
greenish, pulsing, a clutch
of snake eggs.

CAVE PAINTING

Under the hill: going
in and out
by a low wooden door.

We have left the summer
vineyards, the fat sheep,
the black bull
drowsing beside the stream.

Each step a century.
Above us the tundra
cracks in the wind.
The glacier advances.

The lantern hisses
like a snake. Fed by our breath
a spirit deer
starts from the wall, snared
in nets of light.

Small ochre eidola of horses
string out, fording
a crystal vein. Their coats
are shaggy, the river
will soon freeze over.

Tonight they will be safe.
But already
mares heavy with foal
are gathering above on the plain,
and in the sparse birchwood a deer
is licking the place on its flank
where the arrow will enter.

And a door opens
and shuts. It is
now. A man and woman,
sheep grazing, a black bull,
will circle the wall
tomorrow: under the hill.

MAKING BOUILLABAISSE

The red-haired fishwoman
 chooses for me:
 three rascasse, two rougets,
 one dorade, shrimps, mussels
 and three mean-looking heads
 each as big as a fish.

Going home in the train
 they soak through the newspaper,
 drip from my net
 onto the clean train floor.
 Their smell trails me home.

Weeping, I slice onions.
 The fish make wicked mouths. Spiky,
 spiny, glittering with pink and gray scales
 they flop under my knife
 and prick my thumbs.
 The heads regard me
 cooking.

The cats from next door
 wind themselves yowling around my ankles.
 I dare not lift the lid
 for fear they will hurl themselves in,
 and I remember the story of Gwion
 who dipped his finger in the witch's cauldron
 licked it, and understood
 the speech of beasts.

I'll talk with cats, and heed
 the prophesies of fish.
 I taste the soup. Tonight we'll eat
 a broth as rich as blood,
 life-giving as the salty sea
 in which our earliest mother
 cooks us up.

WOMEN OF AVIGNON

Sycamores, their bark
reticulate as the necks of giraffes,
shade the sidewalk. A stream
gurgles between houses and street,
and a mill wheel turns at one end.

I pause to touch
the knobby tree trunks, the rough
warm stone. Inelegant,
slightly too plump,
housewives with shopping bags
click briskly along the street
or stand in little groups.

A young man, holding out a map,
approaches, respectful:
Pardon, Madame,
vous êtes Avignonnaise?

Suddenly aware
of my shopping bag,
my old cotton dress,
my comfortable, ugly sandals,
I smile at him
relishing the moment
before my words will betray me.

CELTIC FIELD

Mayday, and fine rain blurs
 the small crooked field,
 shaggy horned heads, hootprints in mud,
 the new season.

Partway down the field
 two standing stones form
 a kind of gate, guarding our entry
 with carvings worn by centuries of rain.
 Hesitants from another age, we trace
 the lichen-eaten spirals, half afraid
 half hoping to uncoil the spell
 trapped at the core.

Oath-bound to this land's goddess
 what festival do these grey stones still keep?
 Bearded by cowhair, scratching posts
 for shaggy flanks,
 if they were hung again
 with rowan and flowering hawthorn,
 circled by dancers to welcome the May,
 and there in the grove
 lovers

how these old stones would quake,
 we would feel the vibrations for miles
 down to the sea,
 and in the upper air the soft rain
 would be gathering.

Cattle have gathered
 in a circle around us.
 Holding two sticks like horns against your head
 you shake them at the cows. They have never
 seen anything like it. Spooked,
 they back off. And we

running between the stones,
 pulled through the field
 to the grove, fall
 laughing, wet as leaves
 in one another's arms. Spring goes
 its ancient way.
 Cloven hoofprints pattern
 the soft ground where we lie.

NIGHTINGALES

You sent postcards from Pisa and Florence,
 I stayed in the suburbs of Paris. I no longer
 bothered to go to the market
 for cheese and mussels and gutted
 rabbits with their
 furry paws and small exposed kidneys.

Afternoons slid into evenings, but it never
 got dark enough for supper. The children
 ate hard-boiled eggs, and I drank
 white wine, sitting on the grass in full
 view of the neighbors.

When night silenced the last
 game of hide and seek
 I got ready, undressing
 in the dark. I opened
 the windows and lay down
 with my face toward the night,
 breathing the cool air, and waiting
 for sleep and for that amorous
 presence to enter our room

like the gleam
 of red gold hair twisted with pearls,
 like veils spun from amethyst, wine
 foaming in a sea shell:

the discourse
 of nightingales.

TRAVELING LEFTHANDWISE

I foretold this journey.
Bundled in wolf skins, sitting together
in the front of the dogsled.
Our belongings neatly wrapped
and tied up with rawhide.

Around us the arctic sunset,
the far mountain, the drifting ice
a giant jigsaw puzzle in the sea.
And mountain and ice in flames
crossed with silver, with lead.

I know I should look, that I never
will see this sight again.
But my eyes are too heavy, my head
won't lift from your shoulder.
The sled glides on toward the ice.

The sun sinks rapidly lower.
I feel your warmth, your hard body,
its long muscles and ligaments through the fur.
We will never get off this sled.
I remember I knew.



OPENING THE SUMMER HOUSE IN WINTER

They slipped into the house
out of the rain and dark.

Fire, oldest god
brightened their talk.
Their faces, bodies: words.

Around them coiled
cold house
their chambered nautilus.

Sparks flowered and went out.
No light showed in that dark
but the fire's rosy heart.

Then talk ebbed away.
Words dropped their veils,
blazed like dry wood.

NIGHT AIRS

My hair, the silver
brush, green fire
in darkness, hushed
repeating sound. My breath
upon your shoulder
this long night. I dream
of salamanders glowing in
the fire that turns
all straw to gold.
Rise, love, the dawn.
A commotion of birds.
Fragments. This song.

IMAGES FROM I CHING

Hands hold the weight of coins.
 Without music the water runs coldly between rocks,
 mute, dwindling, a spot
 of dampness.

Three coins
 fall with a hard clack on the splintery floor.
 Oppression they say.
 Exhaustion.
 A man sitting under a bare tree
 learns solitude. The self departs.

Once I would fall into a trance like an animal's,
 the world washed over me in rivers of light,
 and the weeds, the larvae, the fish in the mud,
 the polished water pebbles and I
 would sing, together, alone,
 I. I. My love. My love.

Cracks in the floor of the mind
 tempt exploring fingers.
 Spatulate fingers widening cracks,
 eyes staring into darkness spilled,
 a sudden overbalancing,
 and three coins admit me
 to the dark side of the moon.

I lean against thorns, stumble over
 rocks. The parched streambed says
 learn from me
 dark watcher
 who I am.

FETISHES

i

I am never so pretty
 as in the attic mirror. My face
 wreathed by a frame
 of fleshy tendrils, the pupils
 black, enlarged, cheeks flushed.
 And an air of haste, the substitution
 barely accomplished: horns,
 goat eyes, a cunning smile,
 still vanishing
 behind the rafters.

ii

In the antique shop, a doll
 wearing velvet and scraps
 of fur, stares,
 lips gaping as though
 about to pant.
 No child's plaything, she bares
 teeth sharp as a rat's.

iii

Relic from a bog,
 a phallus with eyes
 squats in the museum,
 spreads its claws, lashes
 the barb on its tail.
 Glass can't contain
 its malice. It looks
 at me, squinting
 poison, wanting.

I sometimes wonder
 who, at the stake or
 mounting the gallows, wills
 us these toys.

THE DOUBLE

on the other side of the world
you wake before dawn you wash
in the stream make fire
with lichen and twigs
boil lentils in
an iron pot
fold up your shawl
and begin the climb watched
by monkeys and green parrots sometimes
you pass other pilgrims the ascent takes

all your strength
and some of mine
it is why I stand
staring out of windows not moving
not thinking feeling the air grow thin
you move more freely soon you will
throw away your shawl your bowl
I will look into my
mirror and I will
see no one

II METAMORPHOSES



FAIRY TALE

Once in another time, a virgin
 bending over a well to gaze
 at her reflection
 fell, or threw herself
 into another land, a broad plain,
 flowery, lit by
 a moon and sun almost like ours.
 The plain
 flowed continually from the well, it was
 an interior event.

Walking west and into night
 entranced, her hair electric,
 streaming on air, she passed
 a shore of granite cliffs
 and green waves breaking,
 and an old man singing up
 a burst of fish, singing
 into the wind, into the wave,
 singing for his supper.

She knew what boat
 lay tilted on the shingle,
 did not waste time
 looking for oars, not with the moon
 saying Now! And
 Now
 But drew the coracle
 into the dazzling tide.
 She left her clothes behind
 in a neat bundle.

An act of unnecessary
 extravagance, they said later,
 fingering embroidered robes,
 merchants
 who hugged the shore
 and dealt in glass and Tyrian purple.

THE WEAVER

Our dye pots
are earthen and fat,
with knobby breasts, and little hands
clasped around their bellies.

Root-sap, leaf-juice give
our only colors: indigo and brown. We tie
strips of bark around the threads,
and the pots give back
ferns and peacocks, goats
and lizards: clay-brown and blue.

Days get lost
in the weaving. I throw
the shuttle, beat down the weft
with my husband's sword. The children
tug at my clothes and ask for food,
and sometimes there is nothing
but rice and salt
and my mother-in-law's scolding.

But I smile as I touch
the secret coins
knotted into the fringe of my shawl,
and I dream of the foreign thread,
green as a palm snake,
that waits for me, coiled
in the city cloth-seller's basket.

LETTER TO LESBOS

Sappho, you wore
a blue scarf the day
you came to see me off

and now, arranging iris
in a white vase
I think of you

water
overflows the vase
the sea laps your sandals

I am a sunken amphora
painted with meanders.
A cave, a home for fish.

THE WATER CARRIERS

We would range the hills,
ears alert, nostrils flaring
for the smell of water.

To appease the spring
we carried small gifts:
coins, glass images of frogs.

We learned to judge,
by the strength of the current,
its coldness, whether it meant us well,

and we would coax the water
from its sandy hollows
into our great clay pipes.

Carried across valleys
in airy aqueducts
with the river tossing below,

the water grew docile,
never foamed or splashed
until it poured itself, still living,

into our jewelled calyxes,
our beakers,
our cupped, expectant hands.

FURNISHING THE PYRAMID

Your mask in its golden
sarcophagus sleeps
folded in the wings of Isis.

Your servants carved
from the *shawabty* tree
answer for you.

Your soul
will visit your body
in falcon shape

perching on the ebony table
where feasts of duck
await your hunger.

Selket with outspread arms
guards your brain
your lungs

preserved
in alabaster jars
with balm and spices,

but you rise, lifted
on the cry *live!*
Live forever

and move at ease
past this dense barrier, these
things.

INVOKING THE ALPHABET

Here in the streaming, marshy
delta, where the reeds grow
man-high and the green
reflected light wavers over
water-meadows, I kneel
and draw the signs
in the smooth flat mud
with a cut reed.

Darkness. And swaying toward me
certain luminous small forms:

A snake biting its tail
round horizon
boundary between
all and nothing
is and is
not

Bird tracks going somewhere
across sand
one shape only
itself, patterns
the sand to tell
where this
bird

A growth of lichen
on an old cedar
covers its space
records
frosty mountain
nights
sun

A flight of cranes
drawn slowly
across the sky
trailing angled
legs, low, heavy
laden wings
oracular, king summer's
death

My hand
scratching with a sharp reed
on clay
 triangle, curve,
 half circle, cross, begin:
 “here in the streaming, marshy
 delta, where
 the reeds . . . ”

NARCISSUS

A bowl
of paperwhite narcissus
in a pool
of sunlight

the motionless flowers
are their own
reflections the real ones
blossom

near a forest spring
a naked boy
rising through the water kisses
his image the mirror

splinters
wildflowers
bloodspeckled
ever since

EPIPHANY

There was no dusk. We walked
from day into the light
shed by two planets
so close they seemed one star.
Jupiter for kingship.
Saturn to rule
this barbarous tribe.

We had stopped to read
the omens for King Herod.
His palm was crossed with murder.
The time demanded
a sacrifice. We hurried on.

Rumor of bloodshed
trailed us into the hills.
The stars had seemed
to prophesy a king.
Obedient to the light, we gave
our gifts, our warnings
to a peasant's child.

All night
we heard singing. It was
the tongues of murdered children
that called out.
Wild beasts approached
and mingled with the flocks.
The planets blazed above the child.
Dawn rose on the holy day.



CEREMONY

The celebration
has begun. Your rival
bound to the tree, garotted
with a twist of hair, the necessary
ending. And you wounded, alive,
the knife still in your hand, the sun
going down

and the bride
preparing the feast
at a roadside hearth
while the invisible mouths,
little hands of the air, reach
eagerly for food,
for her breasts, her hair, twisting
twisting and knotting

and she feeds you from her hand
the burnt aromatic cakes
in the darkness under these leaves
beginning to creep
like flesh.

PERSEPHONE

Gleam of marble hem
at the far edge of waking,

not the golden masked
truth-telling mouth
sifting dust in a museum

but a susurrus in grass, a mirror
of rainwater puddling the plowed furrow
with branches,
sky:

think
of the dead skull with fragments of hair
and how her hands, petals
opened to let go,
her life
opened

and the black horse
plunged into earth
between the roots of pomegranate trees
growing downward
into the dark house.

CUCKOO

The egg I came from
was mottled brown and green
like my false sisters'.
Our mother paints them
blue, or stony gray,
whatever matches. But we
hatch first.

Strange, how she gives us
her commands:
as the naked others
flopped beside their broken shells
I got my back up underneath
and heaved them out.

Sometimes she lays us in the nests
of humans: wizened changelings
who cry and cry for food
and never fatten.
But canny foster-parents
boil no more porridge for them
than an egg-shell holds. Until our mother
fetches back her own.

I am well fed, an only child.
My feather cloak is almost finished,
the dark gray primaries,
seductive breast plumes. Already
I do her work: a young husband
hurrying home
through springtime woods, and I
deep in elder blossoms, calling
like a bird.

METAMORPHOSES: for my Father

A photo in soft greys:
 you, a young, smiling man
 hold me in your hands
 a bald naked baby.
 You pierce me with a look
 that says
 in future worlds
 and in past lives
 remember me.
 And I look back and seem to understand.

The god whirls in his dance
 —men, fish and stars
 are scattered from his hands.
 Our lives must shift and dip
 and slide together:
 I'll know you as a tree
 or ancient bone
 or stone veined with green.
 I'll be
 the face, the archaic smile, carved in that stone.

A rippling wind stirs the leaves.
 If you are breath
 then I'm the song you sing.
 Trees' roots
 will clasp each other underground
 and their green flying seeds
 will fill the air
 like swarms of bees.
 Begetter and begotten
 what is there
 but you and I who were and are to be?

What lively game this is that keeps us
 at work bridging the windy
 gaps in the world!
 What shape
 shifting already prepared
 forming in air!

You, coming across a still sea,
across the sea in a bronze boat
my magus,
and I
a birch beside a white rock-cut temple
veiling my gaze with leaves
watching you come.

Remember me.

GHAZAL

You are dancing on the threshing-ground.
Your left hand beats a drum of bone.

Rising from the black fountain
I water the trees with cupped hands.

Each night a snake lies coiled on my pillow.
It sucks the words from my brain.

An embryo curled in its mother's belly
quicken to the pulse of a drum.

We are joined in wordless conversation:
a star, a stone, a lizard on the stone.

Shake the bones of your fingers:
the mountains are drenched with rain.

Open an abyss in a meadow.
I will throw myself in.

III
WINTER SOLSTICE



WINTER SOLSTICE

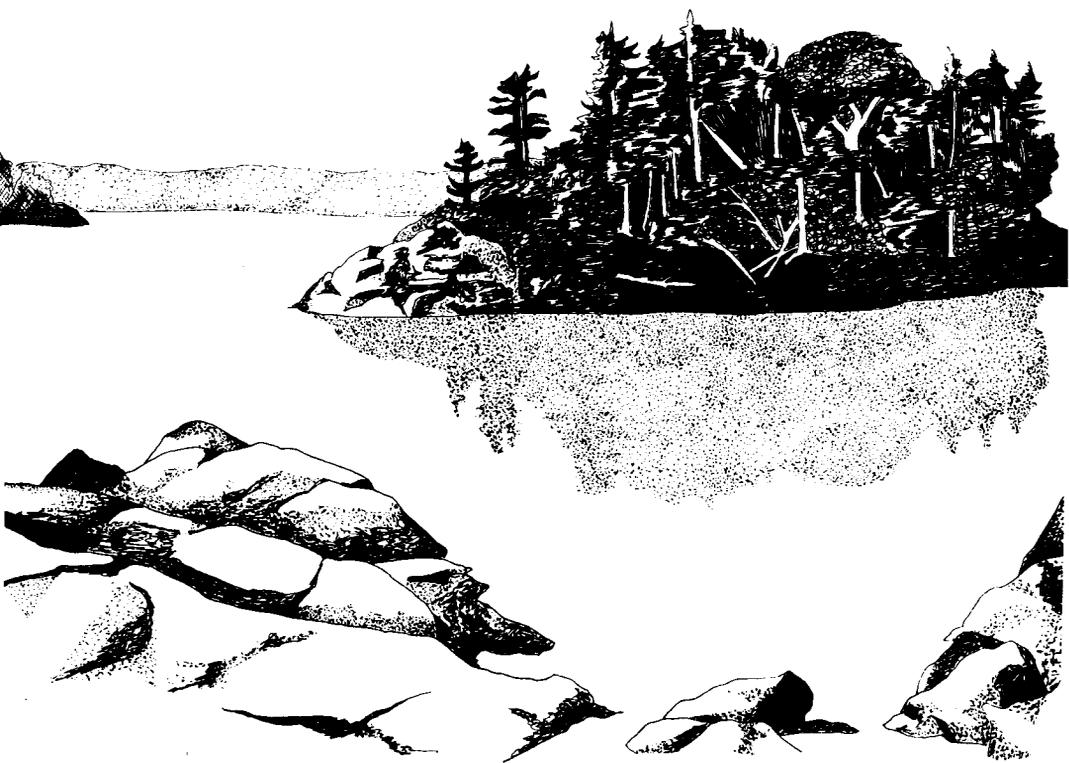
This shortest day,
sun
sinking, a gray ember
through gray sky,
ceremonies of candles recall
June's wild bonfire
how driftwood blazed, fierce liturgy
against the brief
midsummer night.

Today the scales are tilted far toward dark.
Furrows lie frozen.
Twigs of the gray birch
snap in the cold.
But down below the frostline
lapped in pelt
a brown bear licks her paw
dreaming of summer berries.

Cradled by earth
she sleeps
through starry shifts of power,
the winter balanced,
while twin cubs, nose to tail,
grow toward the spring
warm
in her dark belly.

THE WOODED POINT

The wooded point
the river swirls around
the edge of the forest
its straggling growth of spruce and fir
the deep forest
full of tall light
blue green and jade green shadows
the spring in the tangle
the damp moss the liverworts
the red pine needle floor the roots
the roots in the path
to the shingled house by the river
its round kitchen table
the fireplace made of river rocks
the spiral stair the water washes
over and over
the room of seasoned pine
the double bed with its down quilt
the silence the darkness the cold
stars
your hands your belly
your root





KILLER WHALES

Climbing bare rock
above the ocean I turn
at your cry.

Three killer whales
moving in close formation
pause, speed by.

We see them wheel
their bodies' dolphin arch, white
over black

from jaw to fluke.
Shamans masked for hunting, they
send cold shock

waves through the air.
The day grows taut, the sea
austere.

DO YOU REMEMBER

how we sat on the steep rim
of the mountain in Montana
I cried
because the wind
had nearly blown me over

a coyote appeared
noiselessly
on a scatter of rocks
and looked at us
we looked at him

the thought formed
I am seeing a coyote
he was gone

later on top of the mountain
with the sun and the wind
crystal
and the bees
a golden humming blur
we ate our lunch
remember?
in the thin air and the sun

with nothing around us
but miles
of trees and mountains
and the secret
comings and goings of animals

the coyote
must be dead now
and when we too die
that moment when we met
will disappear
like an animal
back into its darkness

EQUINOX

Stand there, still,
against the flowering elm
the blossoms trailing
like woodsmoke
across the dark branches
and you.

I might never
have marked that first flowering,
plain as breadcrumbs, tight
as knots. But you filled
my blue pitcher with elm buds
and they hatched in the window
like sparrows.

Now in the ambiguous light
the honey-brown swarm
blurs your face. Poised
on the dark edge of winter, Love, turn
to me, it is
spring.

EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY: for Margie

The day we walked the ocean edge
your white hair curled in the wind
like a girl's. "I never bring a scarf"
you said, and the sea
flung its green shawls at your feet.

A tide pool sparkled in the sun.
Mussels no bigger than a fish scale clung
to frills of Irish moss. We watched
tiny crustaceans darting after prey
invisible to us, until our touch
sent tidal waves across their ocean.

Gulls screamed and tumbled in the wind,
wanting us gone. Their chicks lay hidden,
stones among stone. A seal
lifted its face above the waves
and watched us.

You took no photographs,
made no collection
of shells or sea-glass. You were here
as empty-handed as the air,
yet you were rich, as though the day
had wrapped itself into a glittering present.

We knew we'd not
come here again, together.
Our strip of beach was narrowing
as we walked.
By night this landspit would return to sea,
only its center of wild rose
and beach pea holding out against the tide.

In the meadow our car,
its battery dead, sat with eel grass
tapping at the windows.
It seemed no concern of ours. We watched
the sun set, shared
a bag of cherries and the last
warm beer, and waited,
light-headed castaways,
for expeditions from another world
to find us.

OBSSESSED BY GREEN

explores
 trying to read
 what meaning
 in, say, green leaves.
 Green and still
 leaves
 "Diana in the woodes green" is
 no metaphor.

Juniper, bay, poplar, spruce,
 wild apple, meadowgrass,
 blackberry bramble
 open
 to sunlight or rough air
 "so amorous as this lovely green"
 birdnotes, continuum
 green to music

closed. Again. Climbs swaying into
 glass-green water,
 green trees' reflected light.
 Pondsurface membrane
 shivers, parts,
 encloses
 like green amber
 closes.

No, back.
 To where the green
 leaves of the green
 wood leafing
 open
 green
 and now there is no seer,
 just seen.

AURA

you thread your way
along a forested shore
it is past noon

a gull wheels '°
through deep blue air
a breeze starts up

chanterelles raise
fluted dull gold cups
above green moss

a birch glitters
behind slanting shadows
the winds blows

harder now
whipping strands of hair
against your eyes

you lay your hand
upon a tree's warm skin
the world

falls away
the gull cries
into the risen wind

IN THE GROVE

Our senses withdraw, wounded
by solid shafts
of light. Like children
forbidden to enter
they chatter at the edge
of the forest. Green shadows of birds
flicker in the leaves. A stone
inches forward. A branch
crashes to earth
in perfect silence.

We will not remember
what was encountered here
or if there was music. We will return
perhaps, to this spot,
these tremulous birches, the light
receding. An odor,
pungent as foxfur, or blood,
in the air: the grove,
casual, untidy, a litter
of leaves and moss,
and the cracking of twigs
somewhere off in the forest.

ISLAND PICNIC: for Gay and Pete

The day was wholly of the sea.
We were held in the day. Our boat
dipped to the rippling waves.

An island slid long rocks
like feet into the water. Arms of rock
beckoned us with small harbors.

Light blazed on cliffs where gulls
flew up. A wilderness of spruce
made a cold secret murmur.

The island held us on its rim,
shore birds until the tide came in
and washed us back to sea

and a changed weather sent us home
past dolphins headed out to ride
the rising storm.

FISHER KING

Reflected in the pearl-blue mud,
neck curved to strike,
you summon a wry-mouth
from its hole. You dine
elegantly, rinsing your victim
before beaking it down. Gulls sidle,
nervous courtiers,
in arcs around your legs.

In the heat of the day
you visit secluded marshes,
brooding over your frog servants
from a shadowy cedar.
They feel your presence and grow
less talkative. Their golden eyes
blink beneath the speckled blooms
of arethusa, and swamp saxifrage.

At dusk, against a sky
rose-red and gold as a palace ceiling,
you return to the cove.
You stalk to where
your rival the black-crowned
night heron has set his standard.
You spread your wings
and menace him. He
moves. You move. Slowly
you drive him, step by step,
from your kingdom.

Now it is night.
And still you stand, your stillness
just visible against
the moving water.
Your beak
flashes down. But the elvers,
the minnows, all that stippled fry
dance at your webbed feet
as though you were not there. As though
it were safer to forget
their king, his heron shadow,
his spear.

STUMP CARVING

Frogfaced king
of the wood, I looked for you
up and down the well-path.

Watercress trailed
angular green stalks across
the muddy places. Bit my tongue.

I spared the web
of the spider on the stone
and scooped up water in my hand.

Come clear
I said
but it was just my own reflection

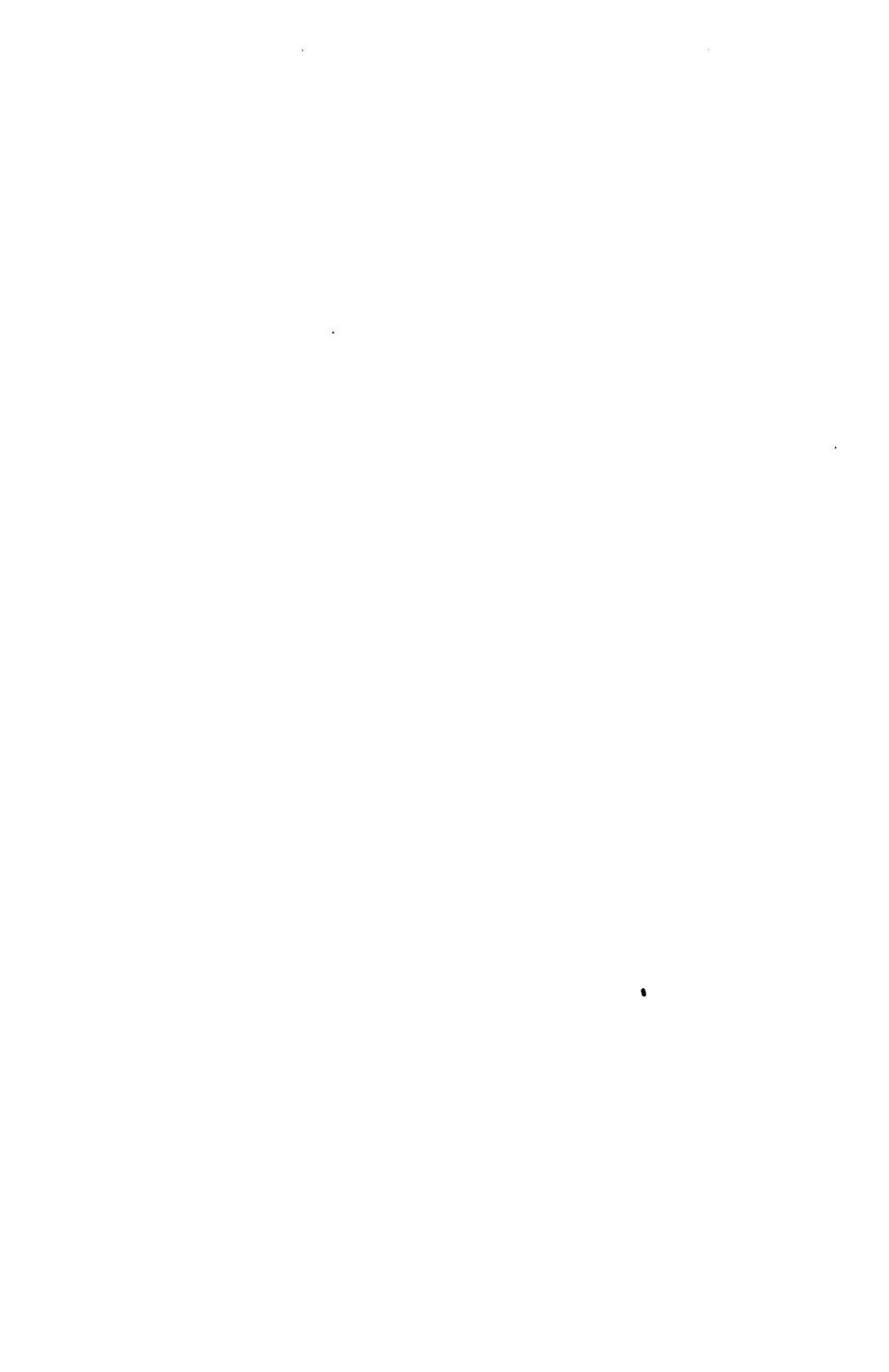
I pulled up.
Goldthread, the poor girl's flax,
pricked my finger

and my three wishes
hid themselves in a bramble bush
and sang like finches.

What tree
holds you disguised?
I asked.

Now leaves
are drifting to the ground.
I have come here again

to find you
squatting goblinwise beside the path,
frogface.





THE BOOK

It was black, with a red spine,
and the word *record* in golden letters.
I made a bookmark, a tasseled cord
into which I wove
breastfeathers dropped by a heron chick.
On the cover I pasted
meanders of tiny yellow shells
and between the shells, sea-glass, green
as absinthe.

I filled my book
with spore prints of mushrooms, recorded
the exact shape of a fox's paw
in the blue mud of the cove. I noted
the noontime silence
of the song sparrow, the hollows
scooped by the wind in the sea:
empty shells, washed up.

I fastened the book
with a string from which dangled
an old brass key. As though
there were something to unlock
and the sound
of the sea
would come rushing.

PRESENT

This is for you
in the coming winter.
The day you think of it
will be the right time. Close
your eyes. ,

The sun on my eyelids
is for you. This rock
against my back. Listen:
a loon's laughter,
a creaking pine, wings
scything the water.

Upstream, I'm
naming these
for you to have today
when you will be
weary of the noise of spinning
tires, engines whining to start, sleet
at your window.

THE SPACE BETWEEN

A day of cold winds
 from the north,
 of black and white eider ducks
 skimming the inlet, a day
 of thin sun staining
 the forest floor,
 and the whisper and hiss
 of spruce needles falling in secret.

Sometimes we go
 through the space
 between two trees
 and know that the air
 has a new feel.
 Someone can read
 runes of lichen on birchbark
 but I don't see her now,

only a shadow
 pulled through the forest
 or folded, long-legged, in bracken,
 and a stranger's face,
 wavering, speechless
 in the still water:
 reflected.

Watch
 for the chance
 to slip in and out.
 A leaf is moving
 back and forth on its stem making a gap,
 there are spaces in the wind.
 Between one moment and the next

a crack widens.
 Water ripples. Twigs
 scratch at the air. And shivering, roused
 by the chill wind,
 the cold light,
 I edge again
 into my self.

EARLY MORNING TIDE

A film of pearl
is all that is left
of the water still ebbing
beyond the mussel beds.

Droplets of quicksilver, sandpipers
run on the mud. The gulls
are stealing each other's catch
and a crow sits hunched
on a rock.

A heron glides
forward, its reflection
ruffles as it moves.

Abruptly

with a sound
of sucking, a million
barnacles open their fortresses,
starting to feed. The tide

has turned. The invisible moon
tugs at the water.

UNDERGROUND

Oblique
a snake slips by.
Some other life disturbs
my mind, jangles my brain, lives in
my veins.

I creep
beneath a root,
become obscure and small,
wait in the earthy dark, don't move
at all.

Secrets
are spilled at night.
Dark holds fear in the bone.
Love licks beneath thin fur, blood quick,
eyes bright.

Hunger
lives in this dark.
Who'll be when I'm found out,
emptied, sucked from my skin, unmade,
no thing?

What gropes
under the bough?
Taste fur, taste breath, taste paw,
do not come nearer, come nearer,
come now.

BREAKING THE SPELL

Snow has covered
the house in the forest the pond
groans in its ice
now the moon rises
its shadows
blue as knives

but in the morning
oh believe this
you will open your door
and find the snow crossed with tracks

raccoon snowshoe-hare
fox and the delicate
white-footed mouse
came close to you while you were sleeping
behind the frozen panes
the frost ferns
the black impenetrable ice



THE DOOR IN THE FOREST

THE DOOR

There is a further hidden door to unlock.
 The ancient way to it lies through a tangled forest.
 The color green is important. No rest,
 until she finds the right tree. Its stock
 will be of uncommon kind. Not pausing, she'll walk
 up to it and embrace it. A kind of test.
 Mushrooms will grow from between its roots. The nearest
 door will perhaps be closed by a glacial rock.
 Of course this is all guess-work. She
 is still looking. Hand shading her face
 she stands attentive on the river's shore,
 her mind gathered, eyes quick to see.
 A willow, shifting, could reveal a space
 empty, and the light-filled emptiness beyond the door.

THE TREE

Preparing to enter the same green space,
 tree and woman suffer, exchange, know.
 What more? Air parts for both, although
 fluid, it interpenetrates all. Their place
 is in each other prepared, there is a trace
 of sap in her veins already, the overflow
 of attentive longing. She has begun to grow
 from its roots. Leaves surround her face.
 When tree and woman touch and become one,
 green wood will speak in tongues of the mind
 that, wordless, grows and flowers and branches. See,
 extending threadlike fingers they've begun
 to seek their food from earth, and rooted, find
 the common life of woman and of tree.

THE STONE

When she explores the forest it is her own
tangled hair that grows green on a swaying fir.
The salty tidal river is for her
the blood in her veins made manifest, plainly shown
by the eye's light. A worn, moss-covered stone,
the forest's lodestone, rough granite altar,
attracts circling currents of beast and star
to an archaic ceremony. Walking alone
in her brown body, sweet pine-smelling earth,
while birds, her senses, dart through summer air,
she seeks that stone hidden in the green, profound
lost center of herself. A new birth
and a blood sacrifice are foretold where
the stone is rolled away, the door is found.

THE RIVER

The river began by flowing through her night.
Where it was, she was not. She was the shore
it lapped against, she was the sustaining floor
it wore away. At first she tried to fight
against its encroaching. Later the dreamed sight
of smooth green water filling the door
to her room by night was soothing. She felt it pour
through the cracks it had made in her sleeping body, in bright
streams. It seemed to her to be rising higher.
Then in broad daylight she noticed her feet were wet.
A spring had bubbled up from under the ground.
That night, in the heat of mid-summer she slept by fire.
But listening in her sleep, could not regret
the soft hissing that told her the flame was drowned.

THE DOOR

She takes the sky's reflection like a pool.
Soaring on wind she mirrors back a bird.
An echo calls. She tosses it a word.
Her scarecrow wears the motley of the fool.
Her bones are hollow. Song becomes a tool
to tune a random breath to something heard.
Where two are dancing she will be the third
dancing unseen. The forest is her school.
A tree, she learned the alchemy of green.
In worlds of rock she learned to part and flow.
Of earth and water, water gave her more.
To will the dark. Abandon all that's been
for what's to come, to be the dark and know
the world flows through her. She's become a door.