

The Wicker Man

When the baby breaks night with a cry,
my first waking thought is *Summerisle*.
Why? Because I am hunting what haunts me?
Because I am a giant fool?
I've always run toward an asp,
Medusa's captive, looking,
looking too hard at the sun.
An algorithm for how I am burned alive.

Also, that night is not so dead after all
when on the other side of the bedroom wall
some unseen adultery is dancing naked for me and me alone.
I wake to *The Wicker Man*, 1973, year after I was born,
a figure in some film I've never seen, won't see,
tempting me toward some motherless guile,
calling in the creeps. Look here, the monster says,
and I'll turn you into stone. So I research it cultishly.
And am afraid.

The baby sleeps on. I would too
but I'm in a dream, the bones of a hare
buried under my pillow, where my two hands hide, useless.
The next day I pretend to be awake, alive,
lifting her neat body in the air for a clean diaper
and thinking *sacrifice*. Something in me is grey and hard.
Something in my hands is a ritual laid bare.

This winter I will not bring green into my house
like the pagans did, then the Christians. I am neither.
Cut down the idols from their strings, cut the green,
how it means to remind us of what's under the ice and rock.

Ice is fine. Stone is solid and loud. In this hushed house
I shiver in the fireplace, trying to stay real
though my dress is blurred from all the shaking.

If one was to look upon me slanted, I'd be
a sear-eyed girl escaping up the chimney.
Naked and bare. A jaybird. A bough, breaking. A suicide.
A petite sacrifice. I live, as they say, in fear:
in a giant man made of tree and fire.
Like a fool. Over the sundial like someone's mother,
eking through the calendar, leaking in the ash pile.
The room is dark except for the clock.
Where's the midnight in this mystery?

Where's the midnight in this sunlit horror flick?
I knew from the start I'd die at the end,
trick or no trick. Virgin or not. Queen or no queen,
heir apparent, little rabbit crying in its sleep
the only words it knows: a certain blaspheme
and away I go into ritual again,
looking hard at what rakes my eyes over the coals,
the familiar torture that knights the break.