

from *Mary is a River*

1.

I've been folded like a mushroom in the dirt.
I've been trapped like something dirty in the dirt.

I've hidden myself in layers of self,
folded into curtains and veils and mothering,

and now there is nothing left to do
but begin to tell—myself—the story.

I could say it all so simply.

I could say, once
upon a time, I lived,
and my living was like divining.

The deeper I moved toward
the truth of my life,

the wilder the wand of me
sang and was sung.

I could say, I loved.

And when I loved,
even deserts beat in me like a sea.

3.

I remember our bodies, how fragile
they were through all of it—

by being bodies, how young.

Sun flushed the skin of our wrists
and glittered its geometries.

It raised us from sand
into our limbs, and our hands
became balms and tutors and birds.

They led us like strange elders.

We spoke through so many languages
with those hands!

They strummed us up into knowing
the being that needed release—

10.

I stood shock-still, my breath
leaving me for the wind.

I was stunned, then embarrassed
by my own surprise

which I felt as a lack of preparation.
So I went inside to get something, anything

with which to anoint him.
But I thought then that even my gift would be

evidence of my unworthiness.

I saw then how we humans hide
shame with our belongings.

I grabbed the jar and finest oil
because I wanted him to be recognized.

But also because I wanted to free myself
from the wealth that had contained me in the world.

See, immediately my love was buffeted by my thinking.
Immediately, everything was upside-down and righted.

11.

When I returned, he was gone—
up the way, talking to a gathering crowd.

So I, who did not follow, followed.
I, who usually led, stood at the back and listened.

And I lived each minute
as a pained exiled lifetime

in which I thought I had done something wrong
and had missed my opportunity

to learn his true name.

Of the flood, I was in it
as strands swirled and swallowed

me and names brushed my thighs
like crustaceans and little fish.

They scratched me with their claws
and shapes, mouthless
hieroglyphs hung in the mud.

I did not hear a word he said
that day. But I saw his breath

drowned in his body, his body
that was shining.

And tears coursed down my face
like the rivers that throb under wheat.