

It Is Not Dust We Are Becoming

We took this twilight inside
of us and it guttered bruise-blue
among our organs, as fear
seized and palsied your feet
that once had been smooth
and commanding on their
stamp dance pat of land.
Toes tell each story twice,
you wrote once. Twice
because once no one was
listening? Or because we can't
know how we have lived
until we know how we will die?
Oiling the gnarled roots
of your toes, I understand
finally, the humility of both
the one who bows to the other
with water and cloth,
and the one who allows
himself to be washed.
Neither is above, we are both
so sorry for humanity,
its long shuffling in sorrow's hands.
Already you are freezing
away from me, your body
stiffening into something fixed
as what it used to be—
a memory, a scent,
and your self, ongoing,
I have to believe, into what
fates or recreations?

A Load of Darks

Never again will our pants
move against each other like this.
You've been dead a month
and I've just found the nerve
to give away a few bags of clothes.
I'm washing them now to free us
of the scent of the place
you spent your last days.
After an illness like this,
there is no burying my nose in the folds.
How I used to love to lie my cheek
on your chest and breathe,
bringing me the children we'd have
like a rhythm rooted warm in the belly.
You were exotic to me as the deepest
familiarity. But now our jeans
are deeper blue and soaked through,
and you are gone to me and who?
Last night I dreamed you rose
from our lovemaking and walked away
a paler man. We could hardly believe
you were leaving and we screamed.
The whole dream had that yellow
tinge of hell we'd come to know so well.
Yet when I woke it was the worst pain
to realize that nightmare was false
and this one, with you gone, goes on.

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.