

Waterways

Poetry in the Mainstream



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Number 9

She is the ghost
Of sleep and shadow

Lines excerpted from

The Sea Witch

by William Corner Clarke

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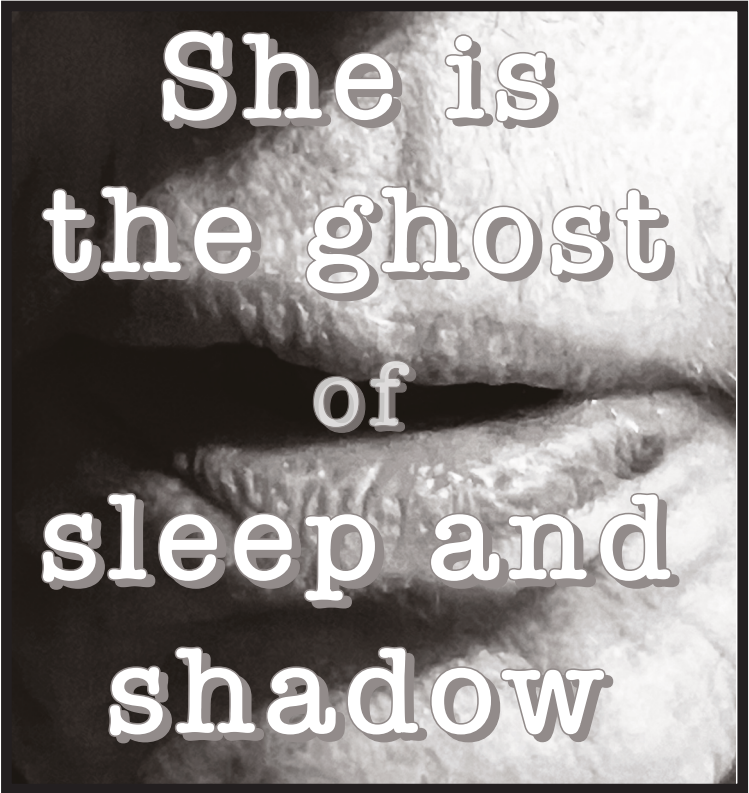
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She is
the ghost
of
sleep and
shadow

Showing Up

A palimpsest
and a pentimento seem
synonymous acts of disappearance and readiness.
But allow me to erase the foregoing fallacy
for the first peeks parchment; the latter painting.

Deborah H. Doolittle

Ghosting the Coast

We live just far enough inland
to pretend that it isn't there.

The ocean, that is. The Mighty
Atlantic. The Pond. The Big Wadoo,
as our daughter called it when she
was two, and we sometimes still do.

Aware that the tides will bring all
that salty water on a great
grey carpet, scour the river sides
before dragging the salt with silt
out again. Part of the local
wash and rinse on the global spin
cycle. Once I had collected
enough seashells, broken and intact,
I switched to shark teeth, sea glass, drift
wood, those well-rounded stones pounded
by the surf. Now when I visit
the shore, it's like I am not there.

What footprints I leave, Walt Whitman,
are washed out before I am gone. Haunt me.

Giving Up the Wind-Swept Coast

The daub and wattle of walls and whitewashed
stones contained them. The rafters and
thick thatched

roof kept the rising smoke of their desires
from escaping. The sweet peat aroma

of turf burning on the grate kept them warm
and wanting something more than the tiny

view out the porthole of a window. Real
glass. Real lace. Real slopes of crags
and tufted

grass rising to the sky. Real traces of
a face that couldn't wait to leave this place.

The mist that drifted across the hills like
sheep in a prelude to sleep and their dreams

of shipping out refused to explain how
those things would be the most of what
they missed.

Robert Cooperman

I Wasn't With Her

I wasn't with her when my mother died;
my brother called with the 3 AM news.
The line was silent, as if in a pew
already, nodding, crying when the rabbi

would re-confirm what we knew to be true:
her love was the gentle inrush of the tide,
warm and soothing, yet fiercely on our side:
the family's fortress, the family's glue.

How I wish I'd been with her, when breath flew
out of her, a wheezing, rickety ride
ending with an exhausted cough and sigh
then quiet forever, emptiness too.

More, I wish she were still lovely, young;
her bedtime songs the sweetest ever sung.

Robert Cooperman

What We Inherited from My Mother

Two cartons
big as monumental statuary
that my aunt sent us,
and Beth and I
haven't opened yet.

We tell each other
we've no idea
where we'll hang
and place the objets.

But that's not the reason:
It's that we're too used
to seeing the Toby jugs,
Meissen ware, crystal,
art goblets, and paintings
in Mom's mahogany breakfront
or on the walls of her apartment.

I've no idea how long
Beth and I will walk around
those two cartons
as if they've become
permanent furnishings,
though I can hear
my mother admonishing,
"What are you waiting for?
Life's short, and I want you
to enjoy them,
and to remember me."

Silk of a Thistle

There is no getting closer
to it than breathing in its
fragmented scents.

Food.

It's the weight of nostalgia.
It's the tangles, and voices,
scars, and echoes of living.

Life is just thistle and silk.
A feast, spread out like
a galaxy, whilst the hungry

fast out of necessity.
We slobber on ripe damsons
and freckled pears, and toast

to eternity as fruit wither,
and the ice returns to water.
Life is just silk and thistle, and

we are its sleep and shadow.

William Corner Clarke

The Old Door

The old, battered door
Chipped and peeling
Pitted - perhaps
From insects, rot, bullets
Or shrapnel from a passing war
Remnants of posters still pasted
Here and there
Condemned, For Sale,
Abandoned, Found,
Forsaken, Found again
Saying to the hand of day
“Push no further – go away”
And it surely seems
It’s just an empty house
With no one living there
Just time-clustered gloom
Dust of shuttered rooms
Music left unplayed
But really there is no house at all

On the other side of the wall
Only piles of broken stones
A lingering of roses
Gracing a garden Long gone to seed
A silent fountain
In a rust stained bowl
And just beyond the garden's end
A wildly growing forest
Held at bay
By a swiftly flowing river
Bending into darkness
Too dangerous to cross
No matter what the mind says
You should do

House of Strange Materials

For some reason
Unknown to me
I'm in a house
Of strange materials
Every day
There are seven
Glasses of water set out
On the dining room table
That no one drinks
All the windows
Remain shut
No matter what the weather
Or the season
And they just stand there
Vacant
Dreaming of lost horizons
The doors all open
According to their mood
And close
Whenever the furniture
Gets too loud

As for me
I'm made
Of unseasoned wood
And warping
Steadily
Perhaps it's because
The roof is just a cluster
Of stolen stars
Still weeping

Briefs

To think these lilies
won't be here come morning.
From my window,
I watch them
flutter in the cool breeze,
their white throats
glare in full-moon light.

In the corner
of the coffee shop,
a young girl gets up to leave,
closes book,
Neruda I think,
one last quick sip of
coffee, the color of
the long brown hair
I've been sipping slowly.

Shooting star crosses the sky,
on eye film between two blinks.
Face in a train window,
melody on my tongue,
gone before my memory can name it,
a glimpse of something fawn
in the brush...
like all brevity,
there's nothing to it
but for me.

John Grey

That Year Back When

It was a tough, stubborn winter
and not even the eve of April
could budge it more than
a melted icicle or two.

The crocuses went about their task dourly,
noting the discrepancy
between time of year and weather
but nudging through crust anyway.

Grim sky lay low and gray,
bulged with more snow
while biting wind
blustered and howled.

My bones chilled,
fingers numbed,
even as the fire burned on.

I was dressed for Spring.
A crocus in all but name.

Sigmund and Big Flo

The atmosphere, it's way up
off the ground today. In it,
Sigmund dances. Today, for
fifty bucks, Sigmund will recite
the insanity defense. Big Flo,
she speaks for herself.
Sigmund often feels he is
drifting alone in the cosmos.
One of the lesser stellar stars,
so to say. Big Flo spoke to
Rabbit Itzhak today. Took a cab
and met him at Danny's Billiards
on Tenth Avenue. Came away
laughing, reminded of the
furniture she'd never had. When
Sigmund saw Nick, he asked
about the house specialty, if
it'd be seasoned better today.
Unfortunately, both Sigmund
and Big Flo had gazed earlier
into the eyes of the Snoll,
thereby losing their eternal right
to ever return to New Jersey.

Longer Than a Moment

Many, many years ago,
a young woman wearing an
angelic face and a button-up
red blouse held my eyes for
longer than a moment as she
was entering a store, an old-
fashioned place with a brass
knob, well-turned, set in its
oak-framed plate glass door,
and I understood immediately
what she'd said though she
spoke not at all.

 She'd said,
Not Now, and I've wondered
for a lifetime since: When?

Another Pieta

We talk about children
their struggles challenges
bridging our acquaintance
so that I finally ask where
her son would be now
and she locks eyes and tries
to tell me matter of factly
that he was murdered
in January in prison
and I'm left looking
at another Pieta
holding a ghost.

At Last

When we found her at last
she lay as if sleeping
by a window with soft light
passing over junipers and stones
left when the sea went away
long ago, to make the Gulf of Mexico

Eons before our familial years
by the Guadalupe, above a weir
that powered a textile mill
with shift-change at eleven,
three and seven, across the street
from that din and cotton dust
where our grandparents must
have thought her father and my mother
would at least never have to do farmwork.
(We're cousins, aging orphans
in these last years of our seventies.)
Porter Street, between, was really
the old Camino Real, royal road
to Louisiana from Mexico City.

We've a photograph, hand-tinted,
from when she was sweetly five or so
with hair waving down to her waist.
Cut short it grew back coarse, straight,
refused to try to frame her face
that seemed to have lost its smile.

But I believe she tried to smile for me
when I'd drawn close to smooth her hair,
loving how it's longer now, at last,
and fine again, beginning to wave.

Richard Spiegel

The undertow pulls us out to sea.
The beach is distant.
All I know to stay afloat
is to stroke with cupped hands
the rust waters off Liberia's coast.
Three Peace Corps
teachers chance the currents.
"Don't panic," her voice implores.

Our Geography of Poets

Bali

James Penha

Colorado

Robert Cooperman

Kansas

Pat Anthony

New Jersey

Gilbert Honigfeld

New York

Richard Spiegel

North Carolina

Deborah H. Doolittle

Rhode Island

John Grey

Tennessee

Wayne Hogan

Texas/Vermont

Sylvia Manning

Virginia

William Corner Clarke

West Sussex

Marilyn Braendeholm

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