

POETRY

fishing in polluted waters

At the precise moment a glint of sunlight rebounding
off the lake's still surface backlights the babydown
fuzzing your beloved cheek, I stroke your face:
a fish scale still glued to my index finger
snags your velours skin
murder will out

O sailor upon these tediously charted waters, beware:
lover of life, singer of songs,
self-proclaimed heroine of this tale,
I, striding these downcast shores beside you,
am a first class, genuine post-Celtic fraud
coiner of counterfeit words, chanter of defunct
myths about mermaids

Just six hours ago, at dawn upon a rotten dock
I dragged gasping from their element five small
and illegal rock bass, unable to ventilate
our unmediated air across their gills carmine
with arterial wisdom, they flipped and flopped
prosaic into the Great Piscine Beyond

Yet no less lovingly did I murder them than I elected
one into the purgative service of basic biology
dissected it finely upon the staining planks
before my daughters' curious eyes
their guts aesthetically arranged
Look, mommy, the heart you cut out is still beating

Five hours elapse and I sit my family down to feast upon
the four remaining corpses, as lovingly prepared
for your consumption as I murdered them
scaled, cleaned, dipped in beaten egg, then crumbs
sautéed gently in dairy fresh butter:
you eat I observe:

*This heart you cut out is still beating,
Mommy*

unbroken, this circle

close on a night's ledge
we both tumbled from
shrieking like newborns
through numbing thickness
into speech
this emergent clarity:

twins we have become, now
each birthed into a new order
where we landed
a compass circumscribed
not the same place but
within this circle, still

like the sweater my mother knit me
each pains-taking stitch
confirms her pattern
when the wool unravels, yet
I am left with dreams
a memory of design
her fingers moving into sense
tracing love

so it is I send you now
this seed catalogue, cornucopia
outpouring
its floral alphabet
from Achillea to Zinnias—
my sometime heretic
know that from this frozen soil
hunched petals delicate
as our daughters' skin
lie enfurled, poised to spring
into sun's sudden faith

what goes around, comes around:
a compass, still
and compassionate

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