

Fallen Verdigris Leaves

Morning has dawned, and the potent stench of paper white narcissus wanders up to me from the meadows. I know Narcissus would be glad to know that his flower makes me sick to my stomach, if I didn't feel bilious already. Has that wicked girl taken every pair of my robes, after hoovering the money pot clean? I keep the bedroom curtains closed and skulk downstairs to draw the rest. I don't want to be seen in my humiliation. My hands feel unsteady, I could still them by making dolmades.

No, I will weave instead. Ah, that lulls me like nothing could. In, and out. In and out, in again. It is merely therapeutic; I have no feverish need to make new clothes just yet. If visitors intrude, they'll excuse my dowdy chiton, matted hair and deadened eyes, at least to my face. I am in mourning for the loss of female virtue; they might prattle once they've left the oikos, but am I not old enough now to deflect unsavoury rumours? Besides, young things are more fun to gossip about; they are fertile.

A woman who speaks at a function is called an epicene, one who is raped in a temple is said to be irreverent. These days, I recognise the futility of talking, but I can't so easily dismiss my role as a disciplinarian. My whip stands in the corner, and my Nemesis bird is perched on the table, feathers bristling in the Spring winds. He longs to soar into the Tyrian purple sky, but three days ago I stuffed him in a cage and have slept ever since with the key on the inside of my cheek. He has already begun to avoid my eyes and refuse the food I poke through the bars. I can't relent; I'd lose all I had if he took off too. Yet by my own rulebook I should be flogged for this wilful attachment to a songbird.

I know Demeter will be over soon. She thinks she's the authority on absent daughters; though she can't be too puffed up about Persephone's return, I don't resent her as much as I'd expected to. After all, come Autumn, she'll be left bereft, and she knows it. Can I blame her for milking motherhood while she can? Meanwhile, I'm exhausted, but not so depleted that I can't face the summer. I'll spend it tearing paintings down and scorching fifty-year-old albums. I'll drag crates of my daughter's novels to the

Olympian fires and Hestia can help me pile them in miniature towers. We'll singe them inch by inch. This is how I will pass the summer until Autumn comes.

But by then I'll still be in turmoil. I know the fallen leaves, once innocent verdigris, will remind me of keeling cities. In this war, for once, I'm taking no sides: I want to shelter in my oikos until the ashes settle.