

Pluto's Wife in Transit

Hades had me by the hair.
Should have cut it.
Mother told me to cut it.

His breath wilted my bouquet of wildflowers.
His horses' eyes rolled like wheels of flame.

The earth bled lava as he
pulled me down into the
incision he had made.

Where was my head then?

The others told me not to pick too many.
Don't go picking *those*, they said.
Daffodils don't do for garlands.
Daffodils don't grow where I am now.

I am an Underworld Woman, part-time.
The kingdom bears my captor's name, not mine.
Today it reeks of wet blanket gardenias, yesterday
of stinking goats the cultists dragged through
rivulets of blood.

I am an Underworld Woman, piecemeal.
Day One: Onyx floors benumb my frozen toes.
Day Two: Volcanic glass refracts my face.
Day Three: My nails carve channels in the cave walls.

He says nothing when I vandalize his world,
and will not release me until he has to, knowing
I will always come back to him.

*

He is my uncle. He wears
chimera leather gloves over
hands I have never seen.

He looks different to you,
your daughter, your mother
and grandmother.

But he is always recognizable
to the X-ray vision of a
woman's viscera:

A lone wolf in aviator shades falls into
step, across the street, with the one
his obscured eyes reflect.

A peace officer without a badge says
only someone small can find it in
between the seats of the unmarked
patrol car.

A chief executive presses a vodka-
coke on you with one hand, his
trousers with the other.

My uncle replays in their tensed minds and twisting jawlines
the desire of the metal trap yawning below a twitching,
timid foot.

*

On the day the gods told him to send me home so that
Mother would no longer starve the mortal folk, my
discernment knelt to learned politeness.

I smiled at him and said,
"How kind of you to offer, I will have
a pomegranate seed, or maybe
three, and another three," just so he
would not be too upset when he
surrendered me.

I ate from his gloved palm seeds that
gleamed like rubies and forever after I spend
half the year in Hell.

Mother does not always trust me when I say
I did not know the consequences, when I say
I did not want his offering. Her hands clench
at her sides and her eyes are cut glass.

She says sometimes she finds the fault with me
and wishes I would stay down here rather than
destroy her infinitely
with comings and goings.

But I always come back.
By divine law I always come
back to her.

*

When my time below has passed, I
struggle upward with the daffodils
through the cold ground to stand in
glittering frost, Mother's crystal
tears.

I do so little up here: sip at pints of
nectar, weave garlands with the flowers
the girls bring from the meadow where I
used to walk. I doze on Mother's fragrant
bed while she stirs the youth to harvest
songs.

I watch young mortal couples playing in the sun,
performing substellar dances in the night that seem to
feel for them like more than metamorphic
rock walls pressing in to
dredge me inside out.

And now the signs are there already.
The air brings a chill.
The flowers wilt and the girls no longer visit.
The nectar tastes of ash from famished hearths.
My time above is up again.

*

I climb aboard the ferry to my lower home.
The first time I got the royal treatment, chariot
and horses and the quaking earth.

Now I take the public transport.
The crowds are endless, the
ferryman unpleasant.
We nearly capsize when the unburied grab hold,
longing for an unreachable shore.

Once the “hero” Odysseus came to feed poor dead Tiresias
blood in return for keys to self-actualization.
He caught sight of me on the ferry and called my name,
the one that mortals who know me as The Girl do not
speak, for fear that they will follow me.

He laughed, “you come here often?”
When I reached out to drown him in
the waves of Acheron, the fate-
spinning Sisters stay my hands. *His time
has not yet come*, they whispered with
forked tongues.

*

Today is the first day of winter above.
Mother abandons heaven and the
frozen earth in usual despair.

But here, below, there are no changes with my coming.
Except for the footfalls on the stairs, and the sound of
leather rapping wood.

My uncle knocks at my door again.

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