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*from* The Mayflies

WHEN I DIED, the sun shone strong. A clear day without much breeze. All the traffic was stopped on the bridge and no one was in any hurry. Many people stood outside of their cars, reading the paper and waiting to go. Everyone in their summer clothes. Everyone alive.

The streets where I died were narrow with shadow. The shadows expanded past the corner store. I walked through days inhaling and exhaling. I had to close the blinds to the glare. Everything I loved was placed into boxes. Everything I had was packed away.

I gazed long at the soft sun. I was down.

When the great wave burst through me I was stranded. Drowning on concrete, sidewalk clanging, I opened the door and had faith in symmetry. What did I know? My ladies redoubled. They ate red popsicles, drooling the juice down. They imitated each other's rhythm, seeming sorry, all of them saying run along now, run along.

DEAD FISH it was rotting mud and insects and we went walking there nights  
the impossibility of really being down in it, fish smell, reaching the bottom,  
dead fish, mud and insects, because the bottom was impossible we went  
there walking deep with mud whatever night in summer it was down there,  
something different than in history, a catfish, that winter it never froze but  
hovered slowly suspended, a slime, scales like armor if you were ancient and  
submerged yourself in it and called to the past, you couldn't get the smell  
right, we weren't a part of this it was more than mud that got into everything.

SHE IS ASLEEP. Summer. Open windows and a cool breeze. It is early morning when she thinks she feels a hand on her forehead. She opens her eyes and sees a flash of bright red hair and then nothing. She thinks it is just the end of a dream. She falls again into sleep. Later, she feels a cool hand on her forehead again and wakes. This time she sees three ladies with bare feet and long nightgowns standing in the corner of the room. They sway slightly, like tree boughs. They have beautiful eyes.

ONE YEAR, early in adulthood, I went to live alone on an island off the coast of Scandinavia. The rocks were hard and black and it rained almost every day. The house had many windows and sheer draperies. There was always a breeze flowing through the place putting everything into motion. My ladies either lounged in the sun or searched the beach for small shells. A young woman who looked like me came once a week with supplies. One time, she told me everything about her life. I listened but she grew frustrated by my silence. Then she tried to become me and I tried to become her. We tried to switch.

Later, when I was dying, I saw nothing but the ceiling of my room, the arcs of plaster hanging by threads, the plaster angels losing their faces. Everything around me turning to dust. I was both silent and could not stop speaking. I said things like, “a long road down to the valley” and “there is nothing but the shape of your hands to call you back, to tell you what you must do.” My ladies continued on. They massaged my arms with fragrant oils, they sang low, clear songs.

When I look at my hands I think, “These are not mine. This is not me.”

THIS IS THE FIRST DREAM she remembers having:

She is walking back and forth on a red footbridge and stops to watch the rushing water, which is like the water that comes out from the side of a dam. It is very cold and the water is several shades of gray. There's an airplane in the sky writing a message in smoke that she cannot read. She is alone in a field. It is winter but almost spring and very muddy. She doesn't like walking in the mud. She falls down into something soft, like feathers. That's all she can remember from that first dream.

SOMEONE HEADS TOWARDS WATER. Here, you can go under. She was separated out.

A body near the wall ended, and her friends and this woman were pulled from the river. She said she could see where the water began. She recalls being in a boat and in the river. She was on her way somewhere.

When she was heading home someone flashed a light towards her. Until she disappeared she pointed towards the river. She found herself there, it was December. No rivers, no sheer straight walls. Someone knows how to explain this. Until she was in the water, she was impossible to find.

Here, the river is 18 feet deep and it drops straight off. She was walking and grasped towards the wall. Fighting deep towards the riprap, it drops the wrong way. She continued. She continued west, it would carry her. There are streets. There are downstreams and currents.

The problem with the river, she said, was no ladders.

This woman said her house was the river, said she lived there.

A bird sings near the levee until a tall, concrete song allows the direction of further north. The structure of variations in the water.

She said someone falls in and pulls herself out each time. Now no one can get out to shore.

She said she felt a small heaving. She started for home. A stone from the rocky bank was in her chest. The river, the current, or the ladders. Something was overflowing.

Another woman fell into traffic, fell over its banks. She was found in the river. It was 32 degrees. Soon, other people would be drowned.

She did not fall through the river ice. She would not have to be plowed off the bridges. Her wings dried in the sun. The summertime was bridges and they came to her with their heat. All the mayflies clung to everything and then they died, the husks of their small bodies still clinging.

Small bodies. The dock and night. Weeds on the riverbank, casting in. Windshields and other junk stranded on the shore. You couldn't drive into the river, you could only bob softly. Headlights and the lagoon when no one was there. Everything transfixed and the water was motion, veined and transparent, you could take a small boat to the other side, and there was something tiny between the nearness. If dark and heavy, if hatched and watching, if you were there, you would see.

THE FIRST TIME she speaks to a ghost she doesn't realize it is not a real person. She is sitting in a green chair looking out the window at the wind blowing the trees over so far she thinks they'll break. She's been looking out this window in her house for a long time.

Her back is to the door of the room she sits in and that is when she hears a low female voice. The voice says her full name. She thinks the voice belongs to a neighbor, or to someone delivering a package. She says, Yes, what is it? Are you downstairs? I'm coming down. I'll be right there.

She reaches the front door and sees no one. She looks all around, up and down the street. She goes back inside and looks in every room, every closet, every dark corner. She is not afraid. She doesn't hear the voice again.



THE SKY came off and she saw swallows. They shone. The place of things. Everything had a now and she walked through it. There were doors. A good omen had been torn through. The tornado people with the walls. She was walking. Everything was new, no one thought her out of place. Who would have gathered the neighborhood? Finding everything had come inside. A joke. She saw things, but where? How they were. She went back and walked out. There were things to be.