

Zoe Guttenplan

I forget to ignore the little dark insidious ones, the ones who crawl between your eyelashes and sink into cracks and crevices and creaks between your toes; the ones you can never quite shake loose from your towel on the beach, who turn into ink splotches just too late as you sweep the page; the ones who weasel and worm and worry their way through your hairs on your arms, legs, even where you dare not look to see for fear there are too many to count.

Dragging one fingerprint across my collarbone and from the roots of the mountains; coursing through shepherd trodden paths worn thin by goats, their bells tolling a steady bass to the wind whistling in fig trees; seeping into and across the sharp lines man once cut into the hillside; jumping over dry stone walls and bursting through every crack; rushing between mountain gorse bushes and even finer, through every spike, brushing past each thistle point.

I am the jockey of the waves crashing the shore, bursting into splatters and softly stroking the next one along, picking up shells and sea glass and salted sand, teasing the toes of barefoot bathers who scream when they hear me roar and laugh to see me swept up again, back arched and breath held with afternoon sun scattered across my surface pausing still for split seconds that seem to stretch slightly while I suck you up.

Icarus

The boy began to delight in his daring flight, and abandoning his guide, drawn by desire for the heavens, soared higher. "Icarus," called the father, even as his proud son flew above all birds. And fearing his student might gain more glory than he, Daedalus made great his wings and, as children plucking the highest apple from the bough, snatched his son. Claiming that he had fallen, he laid the body to rest, in a tomb, and the island was named Icaria after his buried child.

well, here I am silent on
the sound again
licking the salt
from your eyelashes

so we emerge
blinking into the sunlight
catching the last of it
on my tongue

savoring the taste
you put it in your pocket
save it for later

What is blood but water but red
In the morning sun and brick
And mortar shadows when
You have finished your tea.

Tell me, mother, what is blood
Staining fingers like blackberry juice
Sweet to the touch if you ask politely
But don't look sideways at that one, honey.

And what is blood when it rains
Underneath my umbrella
On the sidewalk and inside taxi cabs
So there are rivers in the streets.

Not always did her hands
half-heartedly calloused
Smoothing breast milk on
your brow
hold each other
molding putty into nervous cubes
drum beats written
scratched out
revised
repeated ad ad ad
nauseam until
not always

Flying west again, and ice cracks
drifting under, she straddles
broken china. One heaped tablespoon
of willow pattern or the other kind
and mix until smooth.
Two feet firmly dug into a
ceramic herb garden
plumbed to the nines
She layers filo over butter
To bake the pie her sons won't eat.
Peel back tin foil and lean forward over
the tray table.
Harpoon a meatball and sigh.
It is still lukewarm.

Fingers pressing into fingers
Her heartbeat lingers
Farewell again, once more a stranger
Pushing daughter into danger.

No tears.
But as we hug she
squeezes fears out the corners of her eyes.
There is no five-fingered discount on time.
She holds the train door anyway
Until the tunnel eats her whole
hurtling backwards and
knocked off balance by the lingering
taste of burnt filo, and salt.

September brings branches of apple trees, bare.
Kitchen countertops are piled high with
fruits of the labor of sunburnt sicklemen
and girls in hand-me-down denim dungarees. Bleeding, freshly
sliced straight down the middle, spilling

seeds from each wounded core.
Cut with a knife too blunt to keep the hearts from rotting more.

Boots waxed but unlaced leaned against doorframes,
Still sand-saturated all the same.
This gold is stolen
we'll take it anyway – convention be damned.

The tide rises with fishing boats dressed in
torn shot silk as it drowns the rope hanging
by the side of the path.
Too windy to strike a match
to feel us wishing within our boundaries.