

Night Boats and Other Poems

Unearth

You cross the street. My eyes follow. Deep in this city where you always leave the light on, I watch you glance at the mirror to admire yourself. Once again you find yourself in a room dammed with mirrors facing one another to hold the glut. Tell me the one about the tree that bears fruit underground, a story you like to tell strangers newly met. Remember how, once the fruit is ripe, the earth cracks open to release its fragrance. Spill a dollop of gin on the glossy floor before pouring me a shot. Good cheer, you say, to the spirits in this room. Teach me how to spit like a man.

119

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Night Boats

We were so in love we refused to sleep. We were so in love we refused to wake. Hours spent gazing at the sea, watching its colors change between kisses, never blue—never exactly blue. Even when night fell we kept staring. The stars so thick it seemed we were back in the beginning of the world. When was the last time we looked that far ahead? One by one fishing boats set out with vigilant lamps. Our eyes stayed with them until they returned safely to shore. Love kept us alive to burn itself out then the sound of the sea faded in.

A Game

You urged me to picture in my head the painting of a mirror. “Imagine the sheen of the smooth surface, framed blankness with nothing to reflect.” We were inside a small rented room in a mountain village. The light had perfected the tone of our comfortable boredom. I pretended to ignore this afternoon’s mind game and didn’t look up. I stared at the crack in the middle of the book I was reading. The wind stirred the leaves—the leaves the light on the wall. It seemed we were suddenly underwater. “Now place your hands in front of the painting,” you said and I held the clarity of my hands disappearing.

Firefly

On the back of a truck we lay
open to the stars.

Restless for the sting and balm of the sea
we were beyond reach, as branches hovered over the dirt road.

Flagellants, they say, heal
without scars. I am secretly
penitent for your injuries.

I have learned to fit myself on the scarce edge of your bed, to lie
beside you without touching. This is how I rehearse
night after night your leaving.

Beside a firefly tree the engine broke down. I walked to where you stood
and came so close to your soul without scattering the light.

Unlit

From the bridge you watch

the taillights disappear
near the bend like slow lava

to where your home lies unlit—

where you will come home
late only to yourself and listen for

his grave hand that blindfolded

and led you into a room where you
always leave the light on for him.