

## The Four Elements

### *I. Pasiphae*

Wife: word and vow. Invisible. Bound—  
as heat is to flame. No god did this,  
no pretty, facile cow. A kingdom  
of men, blinded. And me — burning  
to be seen. Burning for him. I chose,  
did not haggle over price. At last,  
in the ashes, after, you see me.

I made sure his whores spewed only  
monsters. And I am one of them.

### *II. Daedalus*

Falling, all my life. Not clever enough  
not to come between a king, his wife.  
No map for how to live past this.  
I dismantled sleep, built wings, became  
the air, took what I loved—rescued him.  
But not to keep.

### *III. Her Son*

I was a monster. I knew. At home  
in the stone prison, innocent, amazed,  
I simply was. But then they came—  
fair and afraid. I looked, held them in  
my gaze, saw it in their eyes: the other.  
A monster. Me. Devoured what they had taught:  
beauty. Became its absence. Lay down  
in welcoming mud, offered up  
my misborn head. Took the blows. Was glad.

*IV. Icarus*

Pick up that shell. Hold it to your ear.  
It is not the sea that sings inside,  
not beating waves you hear. It is me—  
rinsed of ash, earth, and air; no architect,  
ant or string as guide— lost. And drowning.

I carried them all, tried to set them free.  
Burned her away in the sun, wore cloud,  
escaped the walls, was lovely for them,  
but fell for me.

## Firefly

1.

The bats at dusk: wild aerial twitch  
and slide and all the while the moon

underground— not quite silvering  
the edges yet— and you at the door.

My attention is given too often  
to the sky, you say. I pretend

not to hear through the screen  
though it is a thin net that holds

not even the light inside.

2.

I nearly drowned once, or that's  
the way the you tell the story. But

what I learned was how lovely  
the inside of a river is — champagne

cascade of bubbles, fizzy clatter  
of small stones tumbling along

the bottom, the beachglass color  
of the place, the two directions—

air and forward — and the silver  
shine that is the wrong side of surface

the silver shine,  
the breaking of it.

3.

Asleep, my body turns  
away from you. For years,

I will go on sleeping  
curled at the edge of every bed.

4.

I wake and want bitter black tea  
and solitude so much I think my

dreams must be as crowded  
as the firefly meadow, as the bed

the river made.

5.

After a river expands in storm  
taking all that fails

in altitude or grip, does it return  
to the same bed, or has it

made a new one from which  
to relinquish the stolen?

6.

The bats again: not just mosquitoes,  
but also the firefly's glow— desire's

neon sign. In the meadow, mated  
or eaten, the lights grow few, go out.

## How it Started

At the point you start throwing pebbles  
at large bodies of water, you have suffered  
an error of judgment.

Marriage kept sending me back.  
To the river. The edge of it. Sometimes hemmed  
in shards of ice, sometimes rock.  
The water was cold and pushed  
at the shore. At the house I kept setting  
the table. Knives for the dominant  
hand, his grandmother's plates  
in the middle of everything.

Despite the cold, the lack  
of encouragement, several leaves  
persisted on the boxelder.

In the attic I found a mouse— spine snapped  
in a trap, flesh faded to a faint smell  
at the very edge of things. Loosed  
from the broken body— a fine  
rice of white infant skulls.

When he found the limp  
indigo bundle of a bird on his plate,  
I blamed the cat.

When I told him about the mouse  
he reset the trap.

Interrogating the water is one way  
you might get the sky to break.

Everywhere I looked, I kept finding the dead.  
And still I didn't understand.

## Correspondence

I write you letters, in my head mostly,  
as I hike, pretending I am lost.

Sometimes they make it all the way  
onto paper. What they contain

is nothing much: how the Cold River,  
along the road from New Hampshire

in the bitter chill, looked like jade  
just as you once said.

I mention the crack of frozen trees  
in the whip of a blown ravine;

how hoarfrost coats everything  
at a certain height; a hawk threading

iced branches like weaving;  
the way last fall the beaver's

head divided the water into a spreading V,  
how at the apex its teeth

curve in, toward the heart,  
how they glow in the peat

tinted water; the way I dream  
you in a city I couldn't keep;

how in Japan they leash  
cormorants, then let them fish

for carp to feed an emperor;  
how maps fill my head —a metaphor

no doubt. The Japanese also  
have a word —*mujo* —

for the terrible transience of things:  
water on a leashed bird's wings,

the smell of frost, and rivers that run  
so green under a northern winter sun.

## The day beauty divorced meaning

Their friends looked shocked—said *not possible*, said *how sad*. The trees carried on with their treeish lives—stately except when they shed their silly dandruff of birds. And the ocean did what oceans mostly do—suspended almost everything, dropped one small ship, or two. The day beauty divorced meaning, someone picked a flower, a fight, a flight. Someone got on a boat. A closet lost its suitcases. Someone was snowed in, someone else on. The sun went down and all it was, was night.



## Winter

1.

It was winter, that much I remember.  
The light — it came from everywhere  
except maybe the sky.

What the sky spat down into the woods was  
sharp — each piece of dust tucked  
enfolded in the crystal.

How the snow or rain requires  
that desert heart, or nothing grows  
nothing falls.

2.

It was not winter. If there had been  
snow, I would have missed  
the bones— they would have been  
  
invisible in all that hard white light.

3.

It must have been winter or the opening—  
low and on the wrist — would have bled.  
Cold like ether, like a cudgel

is one type of amputation. I chose  
a long splintered bone— head  
like a fist, the entrywound prepared

the thrust, the way it fit — clean like crystal.  
But its companions on the ground twitched  
closer to order, closer to articulation,  
  
closer to meaning.

4.

If it was not winter  
where did all the light arise?  
Why does every single tree resemble bones?

Why am I so cold?

5.

In this way I acquired a phantom limb. No.  
Season? —No Beloved? —No I merely  
reinforced the prison. Bone to bone I wed

myself and when I wake alone, lost  
in the cave, the tangled sky, lost  
in the fall of fractal edged flakes

I give the bones permission to ache  
for the ones separated, the ones  
I left. My hands splay and twitch

for remembered, absent flesh. In my chest  
the message grows confused and I cannot tell  
what hurts: the cage I left,

the one I carry, or my idle bat-hung heart.

## How I Became a Ghost

It was all about objects, their objections  
expressed through a certain solidity.

My house for example still moves  
through me, moves me.  
When I tried to reverse the process  
I kept dropping things, kept finding myself  
in the basement.

Windows became more than  
usually problematic.  
I wanted to break them  
which didn't work, though for awhile

I had more success with the lake.

The phone worked for a long time  
though when I answered  
often nobody was there.

Bats crashed into me at night,  
but then didn't anymore.

The rings vanished from my hand,  
the pond.

I stopped feeling the wind.

One day the closets were empty.

Another day the mirrors were.

## The Maps

When I finished coming to California  
I burned the maps at the edge  
of this wrong sea,

the ash mingling with ash  
already falling from fires suddenly *east*.

I needed a reason not to go back. No maps  
was all I had. I also wanted—  
the same old want— the outside to match

the inside: the hole I keep throwing  
states into, the hole whose size

doesn't change, the one that looks  
like a rearview mirror into which  
everything first shrinks, then disappears.

I thought California might balance the ache.  
It was a big state. I had to try.

## Tea

Nearly dawn, I'm watching the trees  
march out of night, surround again  
this house; the dogs

twitch in final dreams; the stove—  
this orange, unsteady heat  
and black iron box

breathes warm mirage into the cold,  
the sky; the yellow enamel teapot  
does the same inside. The tea leaves

in their white paper pouch in  
their skyblue mug—I've  
brewed thousands of cups

like this: wood house,  
wood fire, the woods  
leaning out of the night,

of their stubborn life,  
the taste of leaves  
hot on my tongue.

## Maps

I buy by the dozen, stack next  
to tea bags, dogfood, next to

nights of no sleep when,  
unfurling a new one, I mark

the places I've lived and draw—  
a westward, erratic line

like a live heart stuttering  
into fibrillation; the line

from most north—ragged  
Ws that doppler away

from winter, season of  
my belonging; the random

lines that almost assemble  
into image, carnage:

the one that draws the witch,  
the one like hands broken

from a body, the great fish,  
worn hills, stalled flock

of birds at scatter, water  
in a ruffle, a rifle, a gun—

I'm leaving again.

## Inventory

There is always a beloved.  
Sometimes there is a husband.  
The two were one so long ago that nobody remembers.  
One of them you slept with.  
Both are presumed lost.  
There are several landscapes, a city, four towns,  
one mountain, and every river that ever flowed.  
One of the landscapes is briefly California.  
All of the towns drowned before your birth.  
There are two seasons: winter and not winter.

Pronouns are flex points in the narrative.  
Sometimes the you is any one of two others.  
Sometimes it is not exactly other.  
He is also changeable.  
I is sometimes I, but sometimes  
its more prescient twin.

The rules involve the number of people, places, pronouns  
acquired but not held.  
When they are not full of stones, your pockets are empty.  
When you believe you are being most direct  
you are mistaken.  
One of the twins has been known to lie, one writes some things down.  
You love best that which cannot love in return.  
The list of loves includes one of the landscapes,  
the city and at least one of the men.

There is always a beloved. Sometimes there is a husband.  
There has never been a home.