

Act VI

Return me. Know that it was not **I** who asked to

[enter stage left]

and *whisper in those shining lights*. **I**

who once spoke stories to the reeds and crawled along the thistles' underbelly. **I**

who now *feel my skin crack walnut-shell-style under the
dawn of ten thousand stained glass windows watching as I pace*. **I**

who begged **my father** to show me one more time
just how he did the trick with the glass and the egg.

Return me to that scene, that stage,
and let me take my leave. Even now **I**
murmur prayers that go unheard.

Once **my brother**

[quietly, almost timid] asked: Will it last?

I skipped four lines ahead and *let my words ring*.

I know my part; **I** know the end.

[terrified of self] No. The sun is setting. And soon the world will fall asleep.

Letter to Mother

You asked me as I wailed:

Why did you hurt yourself so?

And I did not answer then, but I have my answer now.

You did not understand the fire.

It spoke in foreign tongues and the sound,
languid and warped, wrapped around my ears, my mind,
cloudy as cotton.

I knew in that intrinsic way:

If it had hands, it would have
stretched, unraveled itself, and offered one to me.

And I would have given one of mine in return.

It had me from the beginning.

Latched around my thoughts,
choking out anything else, pulling me.

In and in and in.

Memories fly like birds from the bush.

You shifting your hand on the iron handle.

Me with my chin on the counter, listening.

You cracking the sun into the pan, golden and simmering.

The sun, its yolk round and soft, sizzling.

The fire, burning brighter than life itself, blistering.

Me, patiently waiting.

In and in and in.

For all it is worth, Mother, I am sorry.
You raised me on Midas and Icarus.
I heard your warnings all those years; I swear. But alas—
In and in and in.

What wicked words I threw at you
as you pulled my hand from the flame.
But now I hope you know that secretly they were thanks.

The Quiet Delight of Puncture

A sandbar juts, Tower of Babel style, through the North Atlantic
Carving out a melon yellow moon (why, good evening, Mr. Cheshire, sir)
Upon which a granite woman sits, hands folded on knees, form propped on heels
Balanced but motionless, a scale, a living rigor mortis

I sit before her, though her eyes, hollow needlepoint pinpricks, focus
On something far beyond my shoulder
Beyond the bleeding horizon; I wait a moment
Just the one
But her eyes are water on painted glass, impressionist
And refuse to consume or flicker or bend

The sand whips like fire, singing and roaring against the flesh, and I
I must admit
I press my thumbs into the hollows of her cheeks
And watch as the stone succumbs
(Two twin sinkholes piercing through her)
Just to witness the mistiness focus
On me and me alone

The Debt Collector

The debt collector is at my door,

His scythe sharpened at the blade.

The thought churns my stomach quick and ugly: it's September again.

I'm armed with neither knives nor saw nor check,

And he's begging for something that I long for, too.

And I want to take his hands and say: we're more alike than he wants to think.

But, oh, he'll bring that door down

Like the sky crashing from way up on high,

And I'll awake from this American Dream, restless, fingertips torn.

He's ripping apart the frame,

Releasing me from my crude childhood drawings of home and sun,

Freeing me from the cardboard cage I've made; *fly, little bird, fly.*

Tomorrow the streets will carve out a space,

A four-foot squared spot behind the corner grocery store,

And this bird will fold its wings and pretend to settle at mankind's ankles.