

ALISON CROGGON

Divinations

First Divination

DREAMING, I woke up and left our bed
and pushed aside the arms of trees
bent with liquid kisses and I saw
the town where I was born as once it was
revealed in the clarities of childhood
and someone called, far away, my name

then I saw you, but your hands
were flayed and burnt, your eyes gone,
your lovely belly torn and gaping
and your mouth a shadow within shadows:
and the church was broken, the school empty
and leaves blackened the square

the world bled around you as you called
stumbling across the frozen rubble
and then I was afraid, because you called me
into your darkness, and I followed you

RETURNING, it seemed
that eyes bruised
on dark cliffs of flesh:
that hands flaked to ash
in unsensed fires:
that now we stood
helplessly as strangers
locked in a season of frost:
a beat, a gesture, an eyelash
and the sky empties:
the word flies out
and is extinguished:
and everything is lost again
for the first time

THE lovers pressed their cheeks
one against the other

skin bruising and dissolving
in a monstrous kiss

and each passed through each
into pure odour

they had always fought towards
this final reconciliation

birds, lungs, bricks, trees
sliding into black water

EVEN the sun
may not return
to eyes risen
for its blessing

and this vine
winding our bones
rustles ceaselessly
in absent winds

but this leaf
is damp still
from the torrent
of its becoming

IN the simple gardens
the orchards of hair and sweat

mesmeric with dapple and beehum
where birdbreath tunes its delicacies

and the skeined senses tumble out their embroideries
the eyed wing, the amphibian tongue, the feathered hand

where stone loosens its speech and earth thrusts
sapheavy fingers through swarming air

winterless children climb through thorns
stealing berries of light

Second Divination

YOU always spoke for me
so how could I name
what happened later

the earth was generous:
her rising hips
burned with flowers

and clouds darkened on her skin
summoning the springs
of an intolerable compassion

I did not believe
that I had feet, breasts, hands

or sight or breath
to tie them with

these splintered on the lash
of your closing eye

YOU have no other mouth:
the water endlessly rolling
through you speaks itself

water of loss, water of shadow
climbing through the wick
of your dead voice

when I stirred
under your flinching hand
I choked on ash

the world grew
out of the pool of your eye
I stretched, sad stripling,
into your darkness

WHAT is this empty face?
this dry inscription?

these cold echoes splashing
on the floors of dream?

is there no kindness here?
no delivering hand?

this eye rots in sleep
this mouth opens

my heart walks unshriven
through its own winter

Third Divination

YOU open the blue gate
in the wall of stone
and pass through the dense
birdhaunted forest

the ancient rhododendron
drops its scarlet bells
through the dark heavy perfume
of rotting earth

and the branch which snapped
under your swinging thigh
is falling again
into the distant summer

THIS hand was the flower on your mother's breast
rooted in the dark river
which winds into the day and vanishes:
and later it was the crucible
in which the sunlight hardened to a crystal
which glows still
behind everything you have forgotten

you have placed this hand with involuntary pity
along the cheeks of those you love
and felt the certain language break
like flocks of birds spelling out the winter:
a cold sky, a breast of twigs
which your voice inhabits, darkly
drawing to itself its own hunger

and nothing given you but this pressure
of light through your skin
to show how precisely your negations
add up only to beginning:
a mouth poised before the unsayable
an eye stricken by sight
an empty hand

THE swallows too are bending the light
dreaming the blossom out of the frost
with their precise magnetic eyes
and wings of articulate hunger:
out of the panic and twittering
emerges the sun and the splitting cell
shapes an eye for its mirror

and children with voices of water
carelessly inhabit the light:
time for them is a bird
piping its promise on the edge of sleep
not the soft deadly ash
silting their transparencies

A DOG ran from the whistle a child tugged his mother's skirt
the dog skittered through leaves of rain a bird cowered the child chased the bird
the dog circled the twilight deepened the child hit his mother
the bird hid the moon was gibbous the jasmine swarmed through the deepening air

a nub burgeoned with lips and fingers sucking life through its eyes of water
voiceless fearless sunless wingless branching into my blood
the sky tripled its risk folding the clouds in joyous omens
o black foot o little finger of fear
innocent like a lash of hair pricking the hidden eye

who was the wolf who paced the bedroom scarlet tongued and ruffed with hunger?
who was the child which fell into the riddling cabbages?
who was the mouth which steamed a duff of lies in the fuzzy nights?
who was the word which stamped and stamped until all thoughts were its footprints?
who was the eye which broke and bled as it fell on the polished floorboards?
who was the finger wriggling in and plucking out god like a tooth?
who was the thunder cracking the roof until all houses were shadows?
who was the witch who marched up and down with her lonely hammer?
what was the body which knew no names a bloom of nerves a barb of questions?

I listened for you in the throat of summer, in the fanfare
of trees I lingered and spelt their shadows

you rose out my darkest soundings, inaudible fish
eyelessly twirling in warm currents

autumn cauled your arrival, tracking my veins with weariness
and floated you out on sad leaves of blood

down to the icy waters where gentle fingers
will never prise into bloom your promise

and my kisses will never spark your springing hair
joyously into brief unknowable beauty

nor will the eager petals of your skin
char to brutal seed

BIDDEN from silence
where all things wait for lips
to blow their hungers
into the burning air
you touched me and your resonance
still moves my mourning body

nor can I remonstrate
your refusal
although your death is spoken
by my blood

Fourth Divination

(for Rilke)

YOU were alone always
speaking out of that deep cleft,
sexed and unsexed, where carnivorous petals
caress the strangeness of dream -
but what nocturnal meetings
deliver you here, emptied so finally of yourself,
poet whose gaze was self, leaning
beyond the pain which so wholly claimed you

torn by sight
as if trees expand to brutal
stellar dimensions and yet return
gently, to the garden of hands,
where the lip of a hill, an eye of water,
a glass, a window, all are present
silently inside you like a vein
boiling into cloud

which speaks, whose breath hangs over
the dazzling ripples of words, which endlessly
incloses itself and draws so lightly
its darkening head that one glance loosens
infinite fleet transparencies -
o cruel love, coldly tended in solitude,
forcing out of the chilled root
its delicate bloody garlands -

and night moves through you, inhuman, voiceless,
bleakest of gods, deaf
to the continuously dying self delivering
its first and only cry

and the gladness in your being
grows tired and folds itself away
and all the names you mine out of silence
sink back into the sounds of themselves
and the earth raises its unremitting horizons
so close to your mouth you cannot speak
and the roses shut before your fingers
alien, innocent, illegible

and you fall towards the dark
unwinding genitals and tongue and eyes
to feed the faceless wind that scours you:
for who can say what ripens
tenderly in stone, or what flames
sleep beneath black water, or what mouth opens
its articulate springs after the last
songless winter