

## Autumn Geometry (Marriage #8)

At each corner is a turn, an alternative trajectory  
opens like an umbrella or kaleidoscope.  
Or oak leaves, sturdy, tanned umber  
like your fifty-year-old belly.

Each intersection is a revelation.  
The piazza stone is naked skin in sun.  
July is 3 weddings a Sunday in the cathedral  
in Ravello, brides in cream silk and veils.

It's why the slave trade began.  
Call it inspiration.

St. Marks. The Blue Mosque. Tulum.  
I've been assembling rubble, accidents,  
residues from hallucinations, rumors and last acts.  
I fill passports with entry and exit stamps.  
I'm becoming more three-dimensional.

Cross the boulevard, A to B, and your life  
alters irrevocably. It's like spontaneous combustion  
or conversion. You meet him, become a woman  
with a finger strangling in a gold hoop.  
Or you notice a posting for a job, climb stairs,  
assume a chair where you spend thirty years  
staring at scalloped roofs festooned  
with bougainvillea and frangipani,  
stiff eucalyptus smelling like medicine  
above obligatory geraniums anemic in windowboxes.

Or you take a drink, become unreliable,  
a dyed blond, body maggot soft,  
lips that quiver and whisper lies.  
Consider the sound of fire  
moving fluid like an inland sea.  
I had a mother like that. She named  
herself after flowers, movie stars and saints.  
She scented conversations with trivial  
Latin phrases and thought herself clever.  
Here's your quid pro quo, lady.

Can you calculate the possibilities  
accumulating under bells and gray sky?

The profusion of angles a stately geometry.  
an absorption of bleached alleys in villages  
called Puerto Vallarta and Santorini.

Or Caribbean shells translucent as fingernails,  
ovals, moons, color removed in St. Lucia and Antigua.  
There's no remorse in Barbados.  
Just drift sun stripped and blind.

It's Indian summer in the capital.  
In the museum, Monet's haystacks  
in winter rivers loitered with ice.  
You insist his February white is holy.  
Then we must also bless the wet sheets  
of drugged insomniacs, fevered, shivering.  
Where are the medals for menopausal women?  
No purple hearts for varicose veins?

We live with continual malaria, sweat, forget  
the names of common objects, how to buy  
bread and blankets and strawberries.

That is me, now, alive half a century,  
sitting on a hotel floor in Washington DC  
at 4 AM to tell you what white geometry is.

It's flat with gouged lines like boulevards  
seen from airplanes when cities seem scarred  
and stitched and merely conceptual. It's sun  
white and faithless. Ice white in streams.  
It's bone china, femur, egg. It's the brittle  
nocturnal rituals of women in autumn  
leaking their last specific instructions through  
tubes onto starchy cotton hospital sheets.  
That comes later. That's the next page.

They call the canvas sails sheets.  
I watched you set them calm as a man  
with a briefcase of solved equations.  
Two tacks to Malibu. I bet my life on it.

It was when I came home.  
I had a port after all, a mooring.  
You gave me your name when  
you anchored and claimed me.