

Confession in Autumn

The forest is festive in henna, burgundy and claret.
It's a season for alcoholics and drug addicts.
Women who wear too much rouge, smoke,
collect divorces, run red lights drunk,
feeling themselves coming apart
like the landscape in a brutal
confusion of amber and russet.

Here come the coppered-headed women
of autumn. Ladies of the lamps, flames and stage.
Gardenias, velvet curtains, and quiet, please.
It's confession time.

Autumn is a chorus of inflamed women
drinking tequila and six-packs,
poisoning an afternoon.
They're in debt, unreliable, liars. They sing
off-key, buy eight hundred-dollar hats,
call Bangkok and Bombay from your phone.

They have bandages where they once had mouths.
Circumstance has knocked their teeth out.

They contain lexicons of magenta
like bolts in cargo holds. They thicken,
sicken and know tragedy is a friend.
They prefer ports and salt water,
fill glass jars with pebbles from rivers,
seashells, beads, brass bits, bullet casings.
They have improvised childhoods
and fluid destinies. That's why their
ankles are tattooed twin bracelets of snake.
They have their own anchors,
do not believe in cancer or vote.

Spasms of lightning and bouts of rain
alone with insomnia at 3 AM.
Your clothing might be thrift shop props,
the feather boas, the red stilettos.
It's time for another pill or two
and iced vodka in a French crystal glass.

Last week she sunbathed topless

in Mykonos, rode a motorcycle from Naples
to Amalfi, bought Syrian white on the Spanish Steps.
She lost her straw hat between Florence
and Venice. It disappeared like her squash blossoms
from Santa Fe and the baby at fifteen
she never talks about.

In a Cancun August, the charted plane
cast a shadow, a miniature black replica
like an amulet in a cargo cult or a milagro
from a lover meant to be worn at the throat.
The plane was a bullet above the mangroves
in their relentless interior sea and she thought
one thousand feet to grace, bull's eye,
the essence of limestone. Mine, all mine.

You can choreograph these women,
how they bend, shudder, twist.
They eat thunder, thin to bone,
wear perfume scraped from the dead.
Their Chanel scarves are burning.
Their mouths are wells, black lies
have rotted their teeth to stumps
like tiny bark thumbs. They feel fever coming.

Outside, a ruin of maples, a surprise filigree
across branches soft like Oriental gold.
This is what I learned in fifty years,
a tourist in my own life,
empty with not enough.