

Landscape #48

My landscapes bleed as if there were divorces
in them. Even the soft cliffs of Maui dense
with extravagance seem raw and alarming,
as if a bell will ring and afternoon shatter
with intolerable news, lung cancer,
car crashes, barbarians, plague.
In land, they're stoning women again.

They expect us to live
like this and we do.

You say there's not enough history in my poems,
the morality embedded in assurances
from a punitive yet responsive God.
Listen, you need a password for this.
A gene was severed in transcription.
A tiny genetic mutation and I lost mine.
I threw it away. Now I have the gift
of complete indifference. It's better
than amnesia or opiates.

I've known oceans with more intimacy
than certain husbands. Costiera Amalfitana,
the terra cotta villas above Positano,
neon the precise intensity of candlelight,
each window a portal votive-lit, a small coral
pause awaiting the returning fishermen. The cafes
in the piazza of the Rufolo Cathedral embossed
by bougainvillea, a helix of lemon trees and palms.
Perhaps I should have married Ravello.

But we are speaking of my landscapes,
how the jade ferns seem breathless
as if prepared for earthquakes or poison gas.
My clouds are nervous, agitated by memories
of air raid sirens, acid rains, suicide terrorists.

These are the platitudes we walk
on like planks into a bay of sharks.

You say it's always been this way,
the Dark Ages, the Crusades,

the mediocrity of leadership
and the intrigues of shabby presidents.
The 12-year-olds with machine guns.

You say it could be worse. The heart
is fierce, monstrous, confused,
and misfortune an attribute of birth.
It makes the brutally redundant significant.

You don't know the stucco tenements
of Los Angeles. I spent my girlhood
in graffiti debased vestibules. I could see
rooms within, the wine red threads
of Oriental rugs, the piano with formulas
for sound I could not decipher. That father
helped his daughter with geometry.
He knew what a protractor was
and the names of constellations.

There is an ancient stone bridge
I cannot cross. And in the harbor
sailboats, there are always sailboats
and the dock, of course, is locked.

"Landscape #48" was published Margie: The American Journal of Poetry. And has
been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize.

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