

Postcard From Aspen

In Aspen I buy silver. The air is thin.
I need beads in strands hard and metallic.
I learn mountain flowers, larkspur and glacier lily.
The subversive properties of monk's hood and delphinium.

This must be middle age. Standing alone
in alpine fields of blossoming poison.
Your choice. Drink or keep walking.

I expected more, yes, crossing deserts
and mountains in sequences of acute
slow vertigo, navigating to surrender
to this interior port where air turns
spruce perfumed and bruised and dark.

At Maroon Bells I walk to chartreuse
postcard lake that makes me think of Van Gogh
blading off pieces of his face, drinking vodka
and turpentine, bleeding from his eyes.
It's a consequence of unadulterated vision.
Professionals know the common side effects.
Disorientation. Solitude, impenetrable.
Decades missing. A cement enameling
inside the barred cell. Hieroglyphics etched
with teeth. No, you can't teach this technique.
It can't be tamed or orchestrated.
Reeds and strings ignore you.
It's a birth defect.

Art is perpetual unrequited love.
It's like narcotics, the craving for knives
and release, the inexplicable terror of faces
and water, mirrors, rain, voices and sky.
The terminal exile in a wrong century.
It's always autumn for poets and junkies.

The trunks of aspen are like fresh canvas.
Someone unrolled them last night. Or raw
silk, perhaps, smuggled across an ocean.
A fabric that could cost your life.
I'm a high stakes girl, double-fisted,
in one hand a syringe, in one a pen.

The sky between lightning is a corridor

of spilled larkspur, a region of blue and stars.
It's not grace but a vast abstraction
gaudy and broken like remains
from an obsolete holiday.
We saved the ribbons, the hats
with sharp points and glitter.
We don't remember why.

There is a meadow of fireweed
and columbine. Then a river with flat
rocks like moss building blocks.
What fraudulence. No one gets
to start over. Our cities outlive us.

Still I am habituated to the grandeur
of absolute divestiture, a cultivated invisibility
into a complexity you can't decipher or translate.
I am infected with a confusion
so enormous it seems deliberate.

I climb a hill beyond the river.
The clouds are irrelevant.
I cross twelve bridges
and I am lost