

Russian Hill Women

The women of Russian Hill are sun-bit
and craven, ravenous with intelligence.
The examined life has blinded them.

Now they need canes and trained dogs.
Their hands are baskets mossy with phosphorescence.
It's the residue of brazen lies extravagantly strung,
A stunning cunning of daggers and manicures
and maneuvers of lips that trap.

Their necks are a density of Nepalese turquoise
and amber. The pewter has thinned to tin. The prince
has rubbed off, the embossed warlord or god.
Even regional deities ignore them.
It's a decade of aggressive diminishing.

You say you've seen my ship?
The *Squalid*? Still stalled by contagion at sea,
caskets in rows like April hyacinths?
She comes. She goes.

I lived my incarnations simultaneously.
I skinned myself, fashioned flesh-sails.
I opened my legs to the no.
I saw the point of no return in *neon*
and kept going.
It's a process without schematics.
You're not expected to survive.

I'm an anomaly, like a sunken moon,
vulnerable, exposed, locked in increments
of over full dammed damp languid vertigo
and crescents suggesting machetes. Razors.
Erasure is the inevitable answer.
Of course, one half is permanently dark.
It's my best side, believe me.

In an excess of dusk, I want both prayer
and conflagration. My gestures, a mime
with ten stakes of flame.
The tolerance for pain is genetic.
I was wired for fire, deception, lips curve
to half-mouthed whispers. Lipstick.
I have an affection for shoplifting, arson

and the profoundly criminal.

But I've kept track and documents.
I know precisely what I'm owed.

From Russian Hill this bay might be Maui,
the indelible blue I craved a tattoo for.
That was jungle side. 1984.

Some regions require deviation as admission.
Divestiture on the high no net trapeze
I was born for.
Mine was a circus family.
Four rings of neurosis in erratic orbit
like shattered cities loitering above bleachers
then stuttering ruins, metal rain.
This strata of pollution can't be banned.
It's engraved and embedded, like a tumor.

I was the girl on the wheel, the strapped one,
the target for knives. I consorted with insolent
émigrés who knew the future from chants and cards.
Then my elevation to the wire.
Bare feet on barbs are not enough.
You must bleed for applause.

You could scalp yourself.
Or have a ritual haircut in August,
when Mars puts her mouth against yours
and unfurls her meteor shower striptease
streaky slivers of silver, red shudders of confetti.

I am naked beneath an assault of stars.
My limbs form an accidental raft.
I have no compass, no charts.
Navigation is an art, an interpretation.
In all cups, tea leaves form legends like epithets.

Not stars but fragments of drowned women.
That's the lipstick on the rim.