

Secrets and Rumors

The women of autumn have secrets.
Rumors they make their own weather
and stay slim, bones exposed, by taking pills
for hunger, insomnia, mood and nerves.
Remedies are procured in moonlit alleys
by coin and barter under night bridges
when the moon is a dangerous crescent.
It's the hour of the bullet that ricochets
and the rosary that lies.

Autumn women speak the language of contraband,
carry concealed guns, cash, illicit information.
Passwords and gestures, posture, shadow.
Subterfuge is a strategy of improvisation.
Of course, she cannot be exact.
Precision would damage the rhythm.

When asked of hometowns, colleges
and children she's enraged.
Is this a quiz? She asks. A census?
She becomes vague. Restless eyes,
fingers encased in eleven inexplicable rings.
You count them. If she knew you better,
longer, the ruby with its narrative of smugglers
and barges and rituals on piers seven hundred years old
might be possible, but not now, here.

It's October and the maples permanent.
They will be unadulterated lantern yellow and fever
red forever. Their purpose obvious, undeniable
the way a blizzard or a marriage is.

Autumn women wear shoes that crack
on pavement and stick in grass.
She crosses cemeteries stabbing her heels
in dirt as if she could puncture the sleep
of the dead with migraines and nightmares.
Stiletos syncopate asphalt and thunder.
There's a math for this, an equation.
She's a gypsy trapped in cities.
That's why she changes names
each season like rotating the linen.

Last August she was Rita.

Two syllables of twin disappointment,
an unexpected grit like clapping unison
on a beach. Accouterments of the aborted.
She shed it. Rita and the implication of castanets
proved intractable. A confinement.
Castanolas. Castanolas.
A portfolio of castanolas.
It was too much investment in percussion.
It was bad luck.

Katherine is her autumn name.
It's an elegance in the mouth, an extravagance
she senses should not be permitted, but is.
Katherine is remote, a name to winter in
with oysters, Cape Cod weekends.
Now the chinchilla with fox at the collar
and tiers of chandeliered steps to descend.
In sudden oasis's of anointed lavenders spilling
from ceiling lamps like vegetation, with sprouts
of bulbs, she enters a laminated spring.

Her purse rattles, a compendium of unusual scents,
packets, brochures, snapshots, glass bottles of amber
and cloves. A paper fan. Garnets stolen in Prague.
Gloves. A tourist map of Pere Lechaise with margin notes
a calligraphy with an enamel encrusted pen from China.
What else could it be? An anonymous crayon?

That's a lie. She has awkward fingers, lights distract, harsh.
Practice is a punishment, repetition turns her numb.
Do you know why she's crying? Autumn women
wear mink and fox and a foreign thief on a train
took hers. She needs another immediately, though
you're too old/ young for her. Mother would under
no circumstances approve. Then she turns her eyes
the texture of tragedy, granite gray, a two pit quarry
enormous like a primitive winter ocean.

Don't even think about it. No one gets across.