

Toni Sammons / TWO POEMS IF WE'RE NOT DROWNED

It may be true that the more we encounter
the more we discover and know about ourselves,
if we're not drowned.

—Natsume Soseki, *Sanshiro*

The sea dragged much of the sand away,
uncovering a sea-midden of stones,
one-room lime castles, iced glass.
From her window she can hear
it slapping and chuckling over these

and thinks, I might write
an autobiography
just to unravel
a continuity. Love stirs
us as much as whatever trips
those turtles toward the same white beach.
Sea cradles rock with tides,
like all of us; glass lattices
knit up dark water.
Against all this is held
a steadiness of trees.
Sometimes.

If
your grandfather is a sheep,
you may be able to read the sky;
today, clouds and sky flow away
with flimsy irresolution
as though they may have held,
and dropped, the answer.

The child left, and it was no one's
doing. If you were gentle
as an island fox, if you
lay long without speaking
close to the flat of the land
and drank the very salt from the air

like a crystalline ice plant
cleaned the air like that

a child still would be leaving

Different ways of knowing
might be a goal. Old ways

are tuned to a pitch
we can barely hear,
reach toward each other

through our plans and thinking.
which also bind us: ropes of wind.
Some things alert us, some put
to sleep. Red-lilac kelp crabs
glowing through strands of eelgrass,
with all their difficult legs, are better
than the forever fountain
in the garden, and emerald kings
and queens. Mystery
outpaces us, a commitment
at least as long as life. Still,
it is a smile that springs
a smile loose; another
face
wakes up my face.

POEM FOR A HIATUS

You turn in a tight orbit. Indifferent. I ache,
but Greeks could see you anytime, the singular
arc of your averted cheek
shimmering like an aspen leaf. And you won't
come down, through begging full moons
through crisp and slender moons
through red sickles cutting loose
great strands of wind. You turn from any
guardian or embrace, wanting what
you want, paws brighter
than water, going after
night honey,
sky honey.

I said, I'll leave you now. But I only wanted
to watch the seconds clock around your face.
When I finally tried it, you went down
toward a rocky horizon; for the second time
I reel myself in, gasping for air,
alone again. The moon
lies all along the sill
in irregular flakes,
something tangible
from childhood: dried milk
on flannel sheets.

But six months more of this
and you'd hate me. I fumble
toward the coast, wings trying
to be fins again, not wanting
to watch you wonder
what it is
I think I want

which was: your voice
rumpling the air around me, meeting
wave for wave this loud ripple. You could
have stayed in sight, and shown
me how to swim this sky; not like this,
my writing to you from sea in failing light,
pencil marks on slanted waves. But you were right,
we write what we can't live:
these poems are ghosts.