

Cathy Stonehouse / THREE POEMS

ILLUMINATIONS

I

From a different coast you come to me
up the dark stairs, lights have been turned off
your flattened feet are bare, the weapon
hangs half-stiff between cotton flaps
secure in its power to induce the drowning element.
be a good quiet girl. be a good still dead quiet girl.
you climb up the slope of the seaside town
where you learned this trade,
past rocks where the lighthouse flickers,
mounting the steps to your own full size, the sheen
on your quiet flesh exuding its own numinous light.
this is for you, and you and you and you, mummy.
it's in between her fine striations that you'll bury me,
beyond the calculation of the beams, in the cove by the beach
where you buried memory.
as you open the bedroom door
you embrace the family seal,
its convex injunctions
emboss
into soft red wax
what you learned of the symbols 'father', 'daughter'.

i am six years old, afraid to move my eyes
in this body that the dark has given me,
pin-pricked by thin subtle sounds.
i'm waiting
on a cliffhead in my long white gown
for your rippling movements
there undressing beside the bed,
i know that i am doomed to die at sea
your cold white body rising
from the water, solid and vast
against which my tiny mind founders,
a neat wooden vessel, a tinkling marie celeste.

dark hair fanning out, green hands clutching at my neck
i'd swallow but there's no room:
i've seen far down your throat
to where the tongue lies down and cannot speak.
i'm soft and toothless in my shell
black roots of hairs stand out on your upper lip
lie still cathy lie still
and what of the words i know?

night-time seabird father
pubic bone slams against chest
if we are both vessels mine is full yours empty
when our masts clink together mine has a tinny sound.

||

hate no i love you no i
love no i hate you

carved into a grand figurehead, my
head and lungs
turned to wood

daddy

light
strikes your body
like a thin crown, cracks open eyes
like a whip, i can see

everything see
everything i needed to know
needed to know to live
inside you, hush

is this anchor hooked
around which i turn

|||

the wind is up
the night's a button-hook
pulls me
out of all this
tangling, pulled
through the eye of ceiling
that closes to seal you in

nothing moves below
the street lies flat as an ache

while your hair fills my mouth
i rise above our house
lost in the logic of other houses
the map of the ever-repeating
night, imagine

unclothed on the bed
bound wings chafing at my chest
how i travel

flying low above the river ridges
past the motorway
the tramp with his seven coats
snoring in a rusty van
on the road to scotland

travel past all thoughts of tomorrow
to where tarmac meets the sea:
Blackpool, dreaming of the night
they turn the lights on

you can make me dance
but up here strings of light unfurl
miraculous, gaudy
from my mouth

i burp forth elephants
china dogs, whirlwinds
watch the big wheel dip
and the tower door fly open

where an old man plays an organ
made of tiny children's toes
(falling)

MAGIC LANTERN

Thin as snowflakes bright in red coats
we are children stumbling through fog
my father's breath, white
and silent, blurs
into my baby arms
placed around his neck like a fur

then i overturn chairs
in our back garden
you play a small guitar too fast
bow to the camera
and we are specks of dust
an amber glow fading to grainy black

do i call this memory?

the light in the film unbandaging
thick and luminous as kitchen curtains
all it does not show
sharp into my body like a needle-point
expanding to a toxic explosion

the year you crushed your airfix models underfoot
plastic spitfires cracking into dust

when they tested the three-minute siren
on the roof of our school

and we did nothing but listen, carry on
our lives blown thin across the chem lab walls
bunsen-blue, brief experiments

swallow down the nineteen seventies
store them in labelled boxes
what unreels tonight
is the unstable element
you hold up in your hands

the magic lantern
full of shadow-horses, full of children
that run and run
strain their necks but never quite
break the tape

PHANTOM PAIN

*'I hear it all still: sheep's bleat on the moor
and the peewee's thin call in the weeds'* — Ken Smith

Sharp click of latch
into the garden shed.
Cigarette butts
mangled in the ashtray
a dry unfinished paragraph.

I touch cheap crystal, my hand
stunned as a bird on window glass
to recollect

the stone of his cold body,
clogged lungs cradled by a skin
bright and smooth as if
polished.

Daylight stripes
the tall wooden limb
of a spade, empty glove
my hand warms to, nerves colliding
with the reach of his dead fist.

I can hear the bright scratch
of sulphur on wood, the hiss
of his breath, catching:

never forgive.