

Marlene Cookshaw / SIX POEMS

signatures

last night she crossed the field
to mail her letter the stamp
an image of a bare-armed rower
she expects all the men
in old photographs to be her father

she went walking with the man
she lives with they left a film
of scottish armour on mediaeval beaches
she saw in the sky in the screen of clouds
an empty oval the stars slipped through

at the crossing of footpaths in the field
at the pivot of a wheel with the hole
above them the ringed moon the white dog
at the corner of her vision in the morning
he traces the ovate scar on her arm

she looks over his shoulder
for the moon the dog sleeps in a stack
of her lover's new poems when he reads
the sunlight punctures his breath
in clawprints four-fifths of a circle

waiting for the light to change

in the hazy bird-filled morning
the bus angles past your shoulder
stretches your pale jaw to each its windows

the image tensed to linear dimension
winged to either tip of moment
the icy movement needling your smile

on the lake an inch beneath its running surface
the gull stalks its belly like an hourglass

Resolutions

Twelve years later the same dream
spills black from the west,
the sky like a desk upturned.

The neighbour wraps her floral robe
tight, takes her coffee inside.
I pull the drapes to sudden air
when her son puddles absently home.

I resolve my lover's departure to symbols.

*The air filled with cottonwood
and lightning. The slow click
of dog's nails on the hall floor.
The streets breaking snow into flame.*

*The beaked head arches, each silver wing
jointed over half the town, and the sky
still black. Here too the uneasy click,*

doors and windows closing just before I turn.

Here, for instance

she takes to sleeping outside
where the stars pin her fluttering
each night closer to the streetlamp

she wakes to cloud lightning
razing the stars from north
to south like an army in retreat

the dog worries at the gate, wanting
out, shoulders through the space beneath
the moon's heat, blankly. barefoot
in her lover's shirt she follows it noiseless
through the tree-rustled streets
to the shadow where it turns to howl at her
loose shirt, hair. she panics at the reason
in its lack of recognition

they bed again beneath the thickening
of clouds, she swims in the lack
of a tension, her eyes watering
its green loss. till the morning

she wakes blinded:
her own arm across her eyes

Find the inside contour in a ten-minute pose

*Drop an imaginary plumb line from the shoulder
to the heel: see how far the knee extends?*

Her buttocks flare from the pressure
of the bench, thinly cushioned by the quilt
she shared nine years ago with her first lover.

Someone drops the needle on an album; she catches
herself about to hum the scratch in the second cut.

Inch the pencil on the page as if on vertebrae.

With her eyes she traces the broad curves
of stitching, imagines the pattern where
the threads have worn. She's with a new man now.

Be conscious of the process: the pencil on skin.

She's dreamed of foreign countries again,
of threats. When the fly crawls the curve
of her instep, she paces her thoughts.

Her eyes ache from a quarrel with her lover.
She runs her tongue around her teeth
to break the jaw's strain.

cinquefoil

1

I water Alf's box of herbs
resenting their dependence
requiring their growth

On the desk these blooms
chart a vital anatomy

We drink cups of tea
brewed on the hot cement

The veins net my wrist
as he adjusts the spray to fine

2

My father, making tea
sifts the dried blossoms
admonishes my need
to have each identified

When you categorize, he says
you forfeit possibility

3

On the desk corner
the foxglove curls limp
from the lip of the vase

At my father's death
the garden reproduces wildly
The rooms stink of cut flowers

The chicory seeds
itself, uninterrupted

5

Two images should be caught:
Alf and I angular, profiled
on the sheet like silverweed
samples, dried

The powder enclosed
could be horsemint or bedstraw,
moth mullein, knotgrass

A chip gone from the rim
fits the pad of my thumb

4

His belief in place, perennial
keeps him returning Obsessed
with smell, I forget

The mind, he says
continually reinvents fact

The other, I can't anatomize:
The sides of the folder
have rubbed the leaves to net