Song of Eurydice

Understand that I am dead,
dear poet, and do not need your saving.
My underworld sleeps at the bottom of the sea—
a wet conclusion I had long foreseen:
tranquil, yes, but far from dark,
for here shift fish and coral bearing the sun
in their bodies, hammered into such shapes
as only the tides can conceive. Colors? I have those:
the dappled citrons, gentians and pinks
of your hothouse blooms, worn as skin
by prey and cool predator alike.
I am never alone, sweet musician,
for this I have discovered about the ocean:
boundless as dream, it catches
every memory we may care to hold fast,
and casts it as shimmering shadow in water:
clear midnight in your eyes, moles rioting
on your cheeks, your sleek boyish head
tilting as you smile, your slightly turned
lip, the flowing length of your torso
lapping against my thigh, limpid notes
from your harp swimming to me again and again—
fleet accompaniment to the humpbacks' songs
of mellow war and courtship. Borne out of brine,
these forms I can embrace without fear,
for they and I surge as one wave,
a spangled rhythm, repeating itself without end.
I know you wait, still and teary-eyed
upon the warm and rippled surface.
But you must see: here I am free to love you
beyond the encumbrance of a body, sad
and fickle animal always needing to be fed.
A kind of bright outpouring, a happiness eddies
through me with every tidal pulse,
the birth of another moon on the world’s
nether brim, the sheerest stirrings of life
inside the sea’s lambent cradles.
From where you sit, in the pith of your craft,
I may strike you as requiring release,
and indeed your vision plummets now to touch me
with salt-edged words, your hurt elegy.
But understand it is I who have released you
by escaping into meaning’s murmurous deep:
bereft of me, you have needed to strain to hear,
to pitch the net of your voice far, far
into the vast and echoing blue. Listen.
You can sing again, my precious one.
Already you have saved us both.
Psyche

Her error is believing
she can only love him
with the soul.
For her sake
he has been real enough—
shadow-clad and without a body,
the way she accepts
everything must be
in the naked beginning.
His voice, to her,
is water:
when he speaks she feels
she hears his true self
purling out of rocks
in a blurred, dreamy forest—
a thought
which makes her shimmer,
unrecognizable,
to herself.
His words:
she does not mind
stepping into them,
makeshift houses of sound,
which the soul inhabits
if only to be known at all.
But the rest
of his breathing absence,
his lack of shape
and face—
she fancies
to be his most beautiful
feature.
Thinking herself enlightened,
she must make him see
she seeks him
past the accidents
of sight, smell and taste—
faint flowers
crumbling
under her shearest touch.
So it comes to her
as a surprise
she needs him whole, after all.
Like a craving
for something sour,
the desire for texture
seizes her
one breezeless night—
and she finds herself
stealing toward him
with a lamp,
dim and sighing.
The rest we remember
as a tale about gods
teaching mortals
a bright lesson
in temperance:
love, a labor of roots
and sap ascending from soil
to fleshy fruit,
is not so much given
as deserved.
But in her mind
what will linger
is the specter of his skin,
filmed and
warmly gleaming
with drops of fragrant oil.
Beholding him laid open,
at once, she understands:
the love of body
is the love of form.
Body—
the luminous edge
where the soul
can begin.

Gift, 2

Lost in the sea's
unforgiving blue,
I seek you.
Before me
the day unscrolls
its naked scripture:
sun, vision's burning field,
islands, faint presences
crumbling in the distance,
water, the fickle immensities
life is made
constant by.
And it strikes me
I love the sea
because it borders
this suffering world
and the next:
the soul, it is said,
travels in a boat
from a winding inland river,
homing clear-eyed
toward the ocean—
which is the bottomless
beyond.
And I know:
here, upon this beach,
wash the crushed remains
of what was once mortal:
bone and kelp,
driftwood and tentacle,
porous red coral—
keepsakes
life leaves behind
before
dissolving
back to brine.
I am home here, then,
whom the world
never loved,
and from its torn edges
I can almost see
it all end:
an onrushing tide,
a radiant sea-swell
sweeping away all appearance,
gentle eddies
whittling the self
till it is no longer
even sand.
I think of you
landlocked and lost
in another element—
your body.
The sea teaches me
love is a wish
not for safety
but for destruction.
I am not ashamed
to admit it:
I love you
the way water loves.
Which is to say
I wish the world
were through with you,
so you could return to me
ravaged, upon this shore:
a shell
held tight
inside my palm.
Chimera

When you come home
smelling of cheap
  cigarette smoke
and stale liquor,
grinning stupidly
  at the door
  that opens
  and shuts behind your back,
I change myself
as you have
   changed yourself
     somewhere
     in a hall of myopic mirrors.

I
  step in the rhythm
      of your swagger
garble the echo
      of your reckless laughter
squint at the drunken image
      in your contact lenses
flail my arms
      as you breaststroke the air
and let them hang limp
    like a rag doll’s
at my side
    as you press me down and hard
against the soft bed
until my head is lost
   in the maze of yours
and your space is an amaranth
   in my sweet labyrinth.

The following morning
I have
   to disentangle my hair
from your fingers
   balled tight
wondering what might
   you and I be tonight
in this
   vast
jungle.
My Orange Daisies

My orange daisies
are finally rotting.
Their stalks, dipped
in water for two days now,
are as soggy as
tissue paper, heavy
with too much drinking.
They exude the smell of death
not as decomposing
flesh does, assailing
the nostrils violently
with a stench
evil and real —
but softly, quietly,
like a lingering malady
in the air.

My orange daisies
are finally rotting.
They bear the smell of death
as serenely as they bore
the scent of life.
And I,
needing to be rational
and clean,
throw them into the
trash can.