

PASSAGE

Once in sunlight I pinned to the clothesline a cotton sheet, a plane of light
sheer as the mind of God,

before we imagined that mind creased by a single word.
With my hand I smoothed any rivel, any shirr, any suggestion of pleat or furrow.

Whatever it was I wanted from that moment, I can't say. It failed to edify.
Nor did I bow.

And yet the memory holds, and there is a joy that recurs in me much as the scent
of summer abides in air dried sheets I unfold long after,

lying down in them as one might in a meadow,
as one might with a lover, as one might court the Infinite, however long it takes.

NIGHT THOUGHTS

They're on the move again, across the soundless
moonlit snow, five deer
single file along the narrow trail they deepen
night after night with their heart-shaped
hooves. Shivering, I watch them.
Back in bed, in flannel up to my nose,
I listen and listen. In my mind
already the pipes have frozen
and burst, water in a cascade
that resembles plumes of ice down rock face
along the interstate. In my mind
this house is a hovel of ice; outside,
wolves howl, opposing armies
clash and scatter, a blue hand
sticks out of the snow. Almost,
I reach to take it. I'm here alone—
no, I'm not alone, I'm one of the women
left to wander crazed in snow,
the men conscripted, the villages burned.
And then here it is, like a revision of history,
the click of the furnace, O blessed click!
Of course by now I'm too awake
to sleep, and because there's something else
I don't want to remember,
and perhaps to spice the residue of my fear,
I tell myself the story of the monk
who's fallen just over the lip of a cliff.
There he is, holding on to a root
that's slowly coming loose,
and if that's not enough, a tiger
crouches above him on the precipice.
Just then, as if an invisible furnace
clicks on, he discovers within his reach
on the cliff face the single bounty
of an inauspicious planting,
a beautiful berry, fully ripe. Serenely,
the monk picks the berry and eats—delicious!
And as he falls, I realize what's at work
in this poem and all the rest I write.
Each poem I rescue my fear with a berry.
One could say it works: the fear vanishes.
So does the berry and, momentarily, so do I.

To vanish is to live at the heart of the matter;
to vanish is to live at the lip of invitation,
embraced by emptiness and great joy.
Just so, one dark night after *Zazen-kai*,
freezing cold on the beach, last birds wheeling
over the snow at the edge of the ocean,
at the edge of the world, clear how we felt,
we reached out for each other,
no hope of remedy or rescue, no time for fear.
There was only the moment, and the embracing.
Just that. When we walked back over the dunes,
I could see as if from a great height, as if
from the other side of death— two figures
ink-brushed on groundless black and white,
two figures along a curve of road as if in a painting
by Charles Chu—who, whenever he was done,
bless him, lifted his brush, stepped back
from his work, and let loose a tremendous *Ha!*

RIVERKEEPER

Wanting to be that place where inner
and outer meet, this morning
I'm listening to the river inside,
also to the river out the window,
river of sun and branch shadow, muskrat
and mallard, heron, and the rattled cry
of the kingfisher. Out there is a tree
whose roots the river has washed so often
the tree stretches beyond itself, its spirit
like mine, leaning out over the water, held
only by the poised astonishment
of being here. This morning, listening
to the river inside, I'm sinking into a stillness
where what can't be said stirs beneath
currents of image and memory, below strata
of muons and quarks, now rushes, now hushes
and pools, now casts a net of bright light
so loosely woven there's a constellation
afloat on the surface of the river, so still
I can almost hear it weave in and out—
interstellar, intercellular— and isn't it
truly all one, one world, no *in* or *out*, no *here*
or *there*, seamless, as a lily about to open
from just here into everywhere, is. Just is.
Restful lily. Lucky lily. To bloom must feel
like a river's brightening at daybreak,
or a slow kiss, a throb in the elapse of time,
a shudder of heron shadow flying over
shallows that are merely the apparent
skim of a depth whose bottomless surface
seeps everywhere, bloom and retraction,
an anchored flow that upholds city
and cathedral, bridge and gate,
Orion, odd toad in the Amazon, blue dragonfly,
what it is to love . . . Spoil a river, you spoil all this.