

You, Without Shoes

we imagine you with a pen between your teeth
in an electric city

how you escaped the mud
its fierce love of flesh and bone

child, barefoot in the mud you walked
savored the squelching
deep now

the suck of soil around your ankles
your feet have sunk

how do you know

how to lift up
escape the pull of it

our child
gone away

you once were lustrous with rain
your feet like petals

trail of paisley print behind you
we grasped it in our hands
we could not let go

each foot searches
like a prayer before

it takes your weight

shoeless you played
how could we imagine you

all grown up
you, a woman with dreams held like a rose in her teeth

who never let the heels of our history
wear her down

we are old, we have not moved, we stay the same
we cannot understand
distance

we, the ones left behind
who fall

earth calls us daily

but you
you just shake us from your hair

shake the water from your feet
mud invisible

lift off
never look back

Penelope Speaks to the Women

And what it is about the Siren's song
that alarms us time and time again? Here,
even at home, calls up some dark panic
from the cave of our bellies, the hollows
of our woman-bones? A feathered terror
flies into our throats. Airborne music claws
and tears the smooth arc of our sea and sky;
And why is it we hope our men resist
that song, abroad, or here in Ithaca?
We know men sail a different sea than ours.
At night our sleep is restless. Hands tremble
as we weave and thread, do our daily chores.
When mighty gods have fallen to that song—
what then of lesser mortals of this world?

Prey

I heard about your grand catch,
bridegroom with tux and mansion,
jewelry, roses, and all.

Heard he beat your face in.
Tore you up like paper
white as the sheets

of your nuptial bed.
Flung you, many a night, still
kicking, into the snow.

Neighbors drew pretty
curtains against your cries. Some
sheltered you, but then

you went back to wear more purple
badges than your creamy skin
could hold. He left you,

so you found another. And
another. They stubbed your own
Kool Lights on you till

you were a pillar
of ash. And you search,
and you lure, trap them

with your sewn-up
painted mouth
when you stalk in wild places.

Seeking the Snake

What I find
when I look for you

is the wispy accordion of skin
you shed among the stones.

Sometimes
it has your face

imprinted in the filigree
of pale eyes and lips.

I read
the shape

of still-soft scales,
the texture roughening

even as I touch,
and just when I think

I've learned
a little more about you,

found something of myself
in the dusty diamonds

of your sloughed past—
it crumples,

gray ashes
cobwebbing

my palms.