

The Tale

On the cliff of the world it lingers.

A bud, a single green pipe dream.

Unhurried sapwood from deadwood,
from a tabletop stump; sotto voce in the wind

a whisper. It

Sways, smooth-barked and supple
under the storm winds and deluge

for the strength of the world wants to snap it.

No stem
is quite so young. No stem is born

with a snake's backbone and a rabbit's foot,

artless but unwavering; no stem
but this, scarred by time and still ascending,

its flesh wick. Windstruck, winsome

like a fresh fletched arrow from bowstring
it strikes for the firmament,

beetling upwards, ardent and earnest.

It seeks to be an arbour from the ranging
earth, and unfurls its root muscles until it is

unmoved.

As if hope, as if hope, as if hope,
the eternal sapling, has found a home. There is a

choice. It outstrips grief as it grows.

Medusa

Watch her dreaming,
deep breath, gentle hiss.
The rolling hills of her body climb and fall
like a seismic shift as she groans in her sleep.

In the dark she glows.
Skin golden, hair curled,
so calm in repose you could almost presume
you have nothing in the world to fear from her.

Body of a woman.
He had to possess her.
She was scared but he didn't care, he pursued
Called her temptress and took what he needed.

Temple of Athena.
Trespassed goddess, virgin space.
Turned sweet ripe fruit to deadly rot.
She could not face her own reflection.

Wake her in the cave
and she will rise, burning.
Arms spread and fangs bared, a snarl of serpents
tangled in her hair. The monster emerging from the dark.

She would turn you to stone if you dare want her.

Procne

Sister, I remember sharing your bed,
Your soft arms the first to lead me to sleep
when monsters had escaped into my room.
We split our chests open to show their depths.

Sister, I invited you to share bread.
Join us around the hearth and eat. He left
my bed in darkness, opened your room,
pulled you apart to plunder buried treasure.

Sister come into my arms, lay your head
on my chest and weep if you must. For you
I will cut out my womb. Empty the vault
where he would thrust his chief investments.

I will not be the beast's bride, nor mother
to his cubs. I am only sister now.

Echo

Echo,
Floating nymphette,
buoyed up on a bubble
giggling, telling tales. She who laughs
loudest.

Punished,
reduced to breath,
her voice slipped from her throat
and dripped to a pond at her feet.
Only

reflects.
She had to leave,
fled to hide in the woods,
find a harbour in its cool shade.
Alone.

A boy.
She watches from
the trees and sees and falls.
Narcissus loved only himself
in water.

His head
hangs from his neck
like a cut-string puppet,
full lips part to flower petals.
She fades.

Echo
reduced to breath,
fled to hide in the woods,
Narcissus loved only himself.
she fades.

Arachne

She sits in a corner and spins.

Full moonlight.

Sweet dewdrops

Silent Weaver.

small black body.

Legs like paperclips unbound.

When she was young she liked to run and dance.

She only sidles now.

Tens of eyes -

She looks behind

Each side

and up-

made ugly by all that she sees.

Honesty makes monsters of girls who tell tales on their elders.

Their betters.

Better to be silent and awestruck -

bad luck if you can't keep your tongue still.

They'll cut it out.

It was only a joke.

Just a joke.

Overheard in the end

by the goddess.

And she wanted to prove she could,

to show her she was good.

But too much.

Overstepped the mark.

In the end it was too true

and seeing what they do when they think

no one is watching

well that's when they change you.

And yet...

She still sees.

Daphne

It started with her feet.

Caught in flight,
New roots spilling from her toes,
wormlike squirming through mud.

Gone to ground.

Her legs stiffened
and thickened
and grew,
circling outwards.

Her skin cracked,
rough stretch marks extending,
deep rivets scarring her.
Turned knee to heel to hoof.

She was hard for him.

Rough,
tough enough.

She grew thicker.
Too wide for him to reach
to hold her close,

too tall for him to overlook.

She broadened
her outlook.

She lifted her arms,
felt sunbathed
and smirked,

he had to feed her expansion.

She branched out,
arms grew new shoots,
outstripping him.

She breathed.

He took her leaves to claim his victories
but could not conquer her.

Iphis

I found you dipped in the shade of your father's hill, unseen from the edge of the field. You had stolen a horde, figs and bread and honied loukoumades snatched from the pantry. You were winding crocuses into your curls.

Your hand was sticky sweet and you made me promise not to tell your father of your piracy, your skin rose with spring and flush. My laughter spilled over your fingers. Your fingers caught in your hair and so I sat you between my legs and dressed you with roses and violets. You sang and pushed sweets into my mouth.

I would have tasted honey from your lips, brushed powdered sugar and cinnamon from your cheek, but as you did not know that under my clothes my body as soft as yours -
I only looked. Dripping honey.

Andromeda

My mother loved me for my beauty. She loved me for my beauty because it was my inheritance from her branch of the tree. When she praised my beauty, people looked instead at her. My beauty was all that she could claim to own.

This rock is not my home. Not the dusty stone streets or wide orange villa where I spent all my days before this. This rock is a slate stack, stuck out from the grey sea which crashes between my legs, clawing frigid hands up my thighs.

The wind is rough. It whips my hair over my face, it dashes waves against my unmade self. I cannot reach to clear my eyes.

Because of my beauty I was rowed in a blue white fishing boat across the mercurial sea at our end of the world. Tied to a rock in the middle of the bay. The bay is a long way in the distance. In the distance, does my mother weep?

In the distance, something is coming.