

Tenderness of Stone

SAMPLE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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Tenderness of Stone

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I

almost corporeal

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○ Oracle

Reach down to
me
gagged and sightless.

Spill

light on my lapses.
I measured my head's peripheries
knotted
each black cotton muffler.

A self-hooded falcon

I succumbed.
Rip away these bands
from my eyes and my mouth, show me losses
until, dazzled and bloody, I learn
the tenderness of your stone.

Sedimentary

What surprised me was the wetsuit –
how stone can metamorphose
into foam, a proxy for neoprene,
light enough to insulate the flesh,
to speed the flight through water.
In place of a swaddling from ankle
to neck, the swimmer is barnacled
in skeletal fragments. Each bubble
of limestone holds coral, fossil, shell.

Limestone, born from a matrix of mud,
almost corporeal: malleable
enough to sculpt, strong enough
to hold each delicate detail, the flick
of an eyelid, the curl of a hair,
the fractured lace of an edge –
how pervasive this substance,
and how, like us, it turns brittle
if pressed too hard against the grain.

I try to check the overflow

A waterfall is caused by differing
resistance, by the contrast
between limestone and shale,
by the opposition of a body
to the motion of another:
the product is foam.

To find order in airiness
I turn away from such wetness
from a turmoil of bubbles
that pop on the tongue
or seethe and ferment
as spittle, as spume.

Syntactic foam
dominates composites
in a grammar of micro balloons,
like a Bakelite mouthpiece
dense but buoyant
contradictory as speech.

I myself am composed
of memory foam
sensitive to heat and to pressure.
I mould myself for a time
to the weight of you
and am left with an imprint –

my longing preserved
in your ache to return.

Tenderling

Intact as a rock, I made a choice
to open. A *yes* let him in, let the body
do what it does to continue,
as water infiltrates each crevice
to expand the limits of limestone.

My womb hollowed itself to hold
what we made in a crucible,
fed by a rain of maternal blood.
I grew. I grew till the moment
when the cavern of me buckled—

over hours I widened, a frost-tender
stone, a door to the world
for a child rippling out like a spring.
I felt my own dissolution, the labour
of a birth almost akin to a death.

Here we lie, tender parts abraded, belly
caved-in, my infant stranded between
my knees. I know him now— quarried
crystal, a brilliant gentian fervently
flowering, rooting out for my touch.

Structural Alteration

Someone has demolished
the canopy of stone
which sheltered the altar,
shattered its sky-blue ceiling
where an artist painted
the impossible:
stars visible in daylight.

The minister huddles
in hollow air. I think
of the scurry of woodlice
when a rock is shifted,
blinded by an access of light.

The white dome is intact.
The carved mouse still creeps
up the strut of the pew.
What's restored is orderly
as the stations of the cross –
a construct which fills in
the gaps, the way music
returns words to my lips
of a forgotten hymn.

But I scurry, exposed
to what I am lacking.
Parentless, roofless.
Behind my lids, gilt
constellations persist,
persuasive as childhood.