

## WHAT I LOOK FOR IN A POEM

Clear blue light

A single voice, cold, in need of fire

Any world less perfect for dying in

Full circles

The black of night waiting at my bedside

Everything I have ever buried

## WHAT WE'VE COME TO EXPECT FROM BEAUTY

### I.

It is midnight. My apartment is quiet.  
I can hear the cars rushing down Somerville Avenue,  
my neighbor shedding her clothes to the floor—  
the faint shuffle of feet, the scrape of a hanger.  
And I think about her now.

Just one hour ago, stopped at the corner,  
a woman knocked on my window before I could turn.  
I leaned over and spoke with her in the narrow space  
between the door frame and top of the glass.

She asked if she could sit in my car,  
if I wanted to talk a little, the black of night  
shining deep in the gaps between her teeth,  
her face a little gray and tired.

Sometimes I think that is all  
this world has to offer—hapless invitations,  
the quiet offertory my neighbor makes  
each night as she undresses.

She knows I can hear. She asked and I told her.  
I said it without a smile because I believed it did not matter,  
though tonight I need to imagine her in that moment  
before she slips into a long tee shirt and nothing more,

her skin shining in the dark,  
a star and her own source of light  
traveling through miles and miles of darkness.

### II.

Let us suppose you haven't yet felt included,  
that my insisting we have pined together is  
nothing more than that—my pining and you haven't  
wished beauty to find you, to welcome you to its table  
where you would sit, leaning over your elbows,

slipping slowly forward till your hands touch  
like moon light descended on soft, forgiving snow.

But I believe that we all, at the very least,  
should have some. Beauty, that is.  
Maybe even just a little more. That

even in a poem about beauty  
we must be moved to see its two sure hands  
and how our own fit perfectly inside them.

## CONFIDING IN THE PRISON GUARD

*“After me comes one more powerful than I . . . I baptize you with water,  
but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”* —Mark 1:7-8

You see these garments? I made them.  
With these hands. See here? This is the very place  
I cut myself on the blade of my knife.  
See how it has healed, how the flesh  
has closed itself again, grown together, pink and new?  
And this belt. I tanned it from the same beast.  
She brought me to within sight of these city walls.  
Then collapsed. I held her head in my lap,  
stroking her neck until the sun set low,  
and the night was filled with fire. It is true  
what they say about the death of the day.  
My soul, too, will rise above the parting sun soon enough.  
No doubt you will be the one to set it free.

Ah, these hands. They have touched his head. His hair  
filled my palms, slipped over and through my fingers,  
until my hands were hidden, as if they, too, grew peaceably from  
his skin. He said nothing when I lowered him into the river, his  
body weightless. I was afraid I'd lose him to the current, his body  
swept downstream. What would come of me then? I swear, when  
he stood, the water swimming down his face and plunking into the  
river around him like fingers on a harp, the day gave way to night,  
the sun smeared across the edge of the earth, then raced across the  
sky in rivers of light.

I understand I am to lose my head. Will you grant me this then,  
that I might wash my face and hair? And would you also share  
what I have told you? Not now. But after Herodias has slipped  
her fingers through my mane and lifted my bodiless head above her  
own, into the light, my blood dripping to the floor, the shadow of  
night drifting calmly over everything.