

Flotsam

poems by
Catherine Kyle

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The Village Remembers

There are very few left
still alive who remember
her glide through the mist
of the pallid summer dunes,

the way her braid swayed
like a devil's pendulum,
a hungry compass needle
pointing everywhere but north.

The sun and the village
were dreaming of progress
as Leena's starfish toes
clung like lightning to the dock.

Only two sisters,
the coral and the orchard,
spied the ring that howled
from the gully of her fist.

They watched it fiercely emptied
to the belly of the green waves,
shouting like an opal star
as moonlight pierced its side.

The village can remember,
since no one else remembers,
the fortitude of buckling,
the salt on Leena's skin.

Tide Pools

So many hopes assemble in spaces
reserved for things refused—

this shell, a womb, out of which climb
robbers who quarrel to claim new skin,

this soft eruption, bright anemone,
waving its colorful kerchiefs for luck.

Citizens travel to scry for their fortunes,
picking their way over slithering stones

to the circle of blue, the opulent mirror
that informs the moon of its worth.

Her husband's face is alchemic,
hypnotic, predicted and hungered for,

rosary-light. The shape of his journey
is hobbled, contorted, the cost of hope

rising, exhaled through sand. This is
the excess torn from the pearl; this

is the price of star-knowing. He asks
about destiny, all that they sought

and she answers that fate is a choice.
Stained glass murals shatter somewhere

unforeseen by humans. The sentient mud
in the jowls of tide pools raises its head to the sky.

Pysanky

Using the black wand, the *kistka*,
my father rakes thin rigid scars
on the egg's shut face in beeswax.

The eight-daggers star on its forest
green backdrop sings like a magpie's
tantrum netted in hope. Legends say

that the demon who alights on the
unbroken line will fall captive,
imprisoned as yolk. At five years old

I arch in to observe the exorcism and
a coil from my gold scalp crackles red,
seduced by flame. The lock disintegrates

with the sharp scent of gunpowder
until my father's fingers snap it dead
beside my ear. We stare into each other.

The wax cakes. The dark line holds.
He reports that fragility begets dissolution
except when fragility begets deft explosion.

In this moment our hearts are pulsating
pysanky: beautiful, ephemeral, and
brimming with trapped demons.

The eggs, his mother's note scolds,
must not ever be bartered.

They can only be given,
crooked mouthfuls of light.

In spring the shells will float on waves,
a pathway for the drowned.

Cleaning Fish

That was the moment synesthesia set in—
the father's clean knife slicing belly flesh wide.

The swim bladder, stomach, pyloric cecum,
bunked with red eggs in the tent of the fish.

The scent of saltwater, Pavlovian trigger,
resuscitates clusters of life in her mind,

makes her remember the sound of her father
scraping the pearled orange sacs from the skin.

In her dreams faceless children unborn in the village
clasp hands and recite as they jab her insides,

*fish, fish, your eggs will not save you,
woman, your eggs will not save you from need.*