
Night Fires

For Beth

I

If it's true that we don't know
our own hearts, or that we're rarely talking
about what we think we're talking about,
or that there are always at least two others
under the covers with us,
then we might just as well believe
that each of the simple moments we've tried
to hold for our lives
is its complex opposite, or close.
In which case the lamp's new mantle
in its first converting blaze from silk
to ash filament carried instead of our wonder
the final neural failure of bluefish
on ice in the Igloo cooler,
and we ate those fish in lemon and sweet butter
with a mind to the world's loss.
Likewise we should try to forget
the tiny lights
of Emerald Isle and Salter Path
blinking dreamily across the inlet and playing
in the mesh window of our tent.
No, each of those motions took hold
of time on a simple plane,
gathering with them the clean curves of our small boat
Spoondrift, anchored long-line and lifting
high-bowed in the blue-green tide,
the bunted clouds, the elderly kite collector's
mylar and nylon and rice paper
from all over the world, the dragons and streamers
he looped the whole weekend like carnivals.
Our tent was a comic feather

in the sea wind
until we staked it deeper,
laughing and stumbling in the dark.
And then we zipped ourselves in,
high on that dune with our little window to the water.

II

But I'm thinking too about how children want
to be over the deepest part.
As the house gets louder with bourbon
and basting the holiday venison at midnight
they skate alone with a cousin
on the pond that was slush at noon,
pressing closer to the center with each sweep.
It's that moment I have in mind,
neared by simple arcs,
but without the fatal prospect,
if that's possible.
I think of the night
on the North Yorkshire moor far from town
when we came upon the glowing
that looked first like a cavern
within which the deepening earth was on fire.
The next morning we found the great fallen tree
whose center even still was a far chamber
of embers for no reason we could understand.
If it had been a lake the night before
that did not burn us
we would have skated farther and farther out.