

Water Poem in a Time of War

Heidi Hart

The soap curls, eardrum-soft,
my body in the bath as easily

undone. Across the world,
two women soldiers blown

apart inside their armored car,
in the same country where

Shanidar 4, Neanderthal,
lay buried in a cave beneath

enough remains of seeds and
pollen to suggest a funeral.

Grape hyacinth and groundsel.
Woody horsetail. Yarrow.

Those hard bones,
that gentleness.





Horse Chestnut Harvest

There are nothing but gifts on this poor, poor earth.
—Czeslaw Milosz

To spare the neighbors' barefoot children

I put on my leather gloves and gather
this year's nuts still shiny from the cups

that held them until they broke open
in the branches of our century-old tree
that casts its gifts at us, from chandeliers of blossom

in the spring to this unwanted harvest and
the shedding of each broad, slick leaf. The world
grows plural, multiple, and doesn't seem to
tire, even this late in our tree's life, fall after fall.

My gloves scoop up another handful, brushing
soil where too much shade has kept
the grass from growing. The chestnuts smell
like childhood. How I used to hoard the ones
I found in the back gully, kindergarten afternoons,

and how they rolled out of my palm as hard as I
tried to hold on. I roll these into one tall grocery bag
and then another. Too much to carry in one load.
I want to take some to the friend who threatened
to jump from her balcony last week. There's enough
falling in the world, good seeds, this poison harvest,

all of it the world we know, and so I grieve
to think of snapping free from what may be
the only heaven, here.



Cherubim

The morning of the funeral, our maple fills with monarchs heading north from Mexico. We stand with bare feet deep in blossom litter, the same blooms the sticky bodies cling to,

orange-scaled, poison wings all shuttering, and every time a car rolls by, the tree bursts open. My sons chase the thousand wings until the angel folds its multiplicity into the leaves

and sleeps. After the funeral we hear a chopper's grinding heartbeat overhead, mission unknown, already vanishing, as my grandfather will swerve into my dreams

still wondering how God made the praying mantis, his mind still out of reach, his body underground, the word I longed to hear from him already flown.



Our Lady of Sorrows

in the photograph, a girl
all bone, with baby—
dead at twenty-four

Mary in the cloister garden
opens out her palms and
does not raise her eyes

on the light rail an old man
lifts up his shirt:
a sutured stab wound

lifesize Jesus in the sitting room
still gazes down into
his painted hands

the girl with severed spine
watches her mother's funeral
inside the TV's shadow-box

outside, doe and faun
chew windfall apples,
find my eyes

the statue of St. Francis is
all opening, a triangle,
a throat for wind