Three Poems · Ina Cumpiano

MIGRAINE

As if I'd seen enough, my vision starts to go around the edges. As if my circle of sight were a timepiece, the face of the man at seven o'clock disappears. As if I were giving stars too much importance, a ring of small, flashing prisms haloes the knives at the table. As if they'd become less important to me, these people eating, their little moves, their fingers, the water in their glasses—they fade. Fade, as if they would still talk forever; even without their bodies they would talk. As if talk were a white noise that has something to do with darkness. Darkness, as if I'd returned to my grandmother's house, as if I'd recalled the silent pianola, the photos of the dead, brown and stiff in their silver frames. As if the dust still held to the one breath of light coming in from the veranda. As if it held, as I'd said can't you love me a little?

LUNA NUEVA

No moon.

My father has told me not to phone him when there's no moon. He won't be home; he fishes when his boat doesn't drag its shadow.

Three of us fished at night by the light of a small quinqué.

A battery lamp would have given better light,
but this is what they've always used. They. We. Me,
my father and his friend, this man my brother's age.

The three of us shoved the boat across the dark and into the cold water. My father and I scrambled in, saved the quinqué from almost certain tipping. A moment's scurry. Waist-deep in waves, the man pushes the boat further, into deeper water.

This man has my father's habit of breathing first, then pushing the heavy weight of the boat, breathing,

then pushing. Their breath catches.

My brother won't fish, he hates it.

The motor tried to catch. Its cough is sickly in the otherwise healing silence.

The coquí-coquí sound of the tree frogs from shore, their white noise, no longer a presence.

The man climbs in; both he and my father sit across from me. Not much space in the boat. Their outlines against the uneven light the quinqué affords are narrow, almost elegant. The same longish neck, the chin, lip, nose, high forehead.

The motor has settled in. The waves make a woody, slapping sound against the boat's sides.

Working in unison my father and the man attach several hooks to each line. Bait each hook. Loop nylon thread to little lumps of shapeless, melted buckshot and tie them to the line, too. Toss the line over. Blow out the quinqué.

The darkness on shore is denser, more complete. We know where land ends, where sky starts. The sky is glossy black, the sea is textured, like fabric. Three kinds of dark. Here, even without a moon, we can see each other: in a place like this, two men, my father and this unacknowledged son of his, can give off their own light. In this differentiating dark, they can be recognized.

Advice

Be like the jellyfish that moves by taking in and letting go. Not constant, unlike the green pilings of the dock that moor and bear the weight of sailors leaving love behind. Allow light to move through the body fracture the light, should it come to that but be aware that light and the self are fellow travelers. Bend around coral, do not let that once live thing pierce your soft parts. And sting if you must. Be sister to Medusa and to the sea anemone who makes the under world believe her tentacles are blossoms: she's saved by beauty. Be the peony of dawn and sunset sky, not plucked by any hand yet floating in this larger bowl at noon: be like the jellyfish that encompasses memory and knowledge both but who knows and who remembers nothing.