

Fishes at Saint-Jean: Chagall, 1949 ·
Roberta Spear

I

Because the sea is also
in me, a sea so blue
that parrots fly through it
and horses and other women
who are true, I want to dive
and feel the ragged edges
of your canvas folding over me
like water.

On the ocean floor
the grass is swaying,
the horses are diminished
and delicate, and a mollusk
drifts between two lovers
fighting the urge
to rise. But up here,
the light freezes
the ivory walls of the museum.
The guard sleeps with his hands
in his pockets.
And the woman selling tickets
drowns in her cubicle,
the hard bubbles rising
from her lips toward the sun.
No one saw it sneaking in
through a diamond of glass,
etching its path of light.
As I follow, the seas part
and all the beautiful blind fish
are thrown at my feet.

If color
is the secret you share,
there are other things
I could tell you,
things that would please you
more than sapphires
or crushed tourmalines,
more than the indigo veins
of fish or birds,
the infinite drops of sea water,
more than the final blue note
of an accordion that carries us
through the warm night air.

II

Like an acrobat in a green suit,
the wave lifts, lets go and spins,
and then another follows.

The small stones clap softly
at the water's edge
where I press a mold for my body
and lie back, letting
the day's heat enter. They say
the agate of flesh inside me
will one day spin out,
floating beyond the children
catching foam in their arms,
beyond the last lacy swell
to a place where the water
barely moves and you are sculling
belly-up, like a great whale
filled with rooms of air
and darkness.

At the day's end, the sun
lifts its nets off the water
and the moon rises.
You swim in and find me
still staring out — the lights
on the barges and the new stars
becoming the same. Perhaps,
I will find my way back here
tonight while you are sleeping,
like other women who have left
their homes for these slashed shores.
And like another, I will make
a wreath of stones
for a small fire which, like the sea,
is the mother of all colors.

Though memories dissolve
in the waves of darkness, many nights
have been passed this way —
a woman waiting it out,
who can only guess how much
of herself she has given
to this world.

III

It's true.
My belly will soon be as round
as the dazed summer moon
or the lush little islands
off the coast.

You smile and tip
the scored carafe of cassis
into both our glasses.
Now, the crowds are filling
the cafes along the promenade,
angels wrapped in gauze
against the gentlest breeze.
Even flies dance on the light bulbs
and old women peek at themselves
in the gritty mirrors behind the bar.

You don't want others
looking at me the way they do—
men with eyes as quick as fish
or those saying nothing
as they melt into their own reflections
on the table next to us.

I like cassis,
the currant-red hills along the sea
where I dreamed mermaids live
in winter, knitting by fires
as red as this glass.

I can't hold it in any longer.
It is as round as the storm clouds
that sailed over as you swam
into shore. The patron
unrolls the awning to the curb
and a light rain collects
the softened faces at the edge
of our vision. We look for one
with a message,

the face of a gypsy child
who has your eyes
and plays a painted fiddle.
In his dish, coins
stamped with the names
of the old world we're in,
and one with the name
of the new world in me.