

The Lives We Invite To Flower Among Us Flower Beyond Us · *Wendy Battin*

For just as a wild animal, if it shall have escaped and thus recovered its natural liberty, is no longer the property of its captor, so also the sea may recover its possession of the shore.

—Hugo Grotius

So just as that wild animal, the sea,
is never in our midst, is constantly
our border, so also
a leopard, even in a zoo
escapes us. He prowls
all our city's avenues by pacing
cage corner to corner, even
when we are most vigilant.

Set him free on a beach.
A body in a halo of senses,
he moves on the sand like water. The highest
wave casts down the shore like a spotted cat.
Nothing, our oldest lesson save one,
nothing is harder than water. The cat
on flat beach, the cat with no tree,
no ledge, as if caged,
cannot contain himself.

So also the thought containing the cat,
set in motion in a woman's
mind, a word
in a halo of sense. She makes
the leopard dark avenues
into the city of men, and then
she makes the seventh wave,
ending in foam still short
of the body poured out on the sand.
But even when she is

most circumspect, her mind
cannot contain itself, as a vase
may hold a flower but may not hold
itself. She loses the word
that strokes her into sense, that moving
cage and comfort.

The cat escapes
into the oldest lesson: no thing
is more yielding than water.

The woman rests
her mind in her body in
a halo of sense,
as if she were the sea,
and continent.