

The River Honey Queen Bess ·
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I

In May it drops down fresh from the mountains,
Dashing silver flakes of water like mica in the air.
Such abundance foils the stones' and hearts' resistance.
 The five dare not broach their wish to dance with water.
 This is the season of their odes.

Early July and not much rain. The pulse slows. Rocks still
Force froth, but the rush is spent. Puckering white
At the selvedge, its weave of blue and green unfurls.
 Three men, two women are rapt in it.
 This is the season of their proposals.

August, and what has always been at the bottom is seen:
Tires, shoes; water moccasins, coral snakes
Braiding in the mud; and what is culturing in
The mirror plates now glazed false blue?
 “A pox on rivers; we always knew,” they say.
 This is the season of their attempted escapes.

After the swellings and fevers abate
The suitors drape themselves in velvet blue and green
To conceal August scars, and order spring-bottled water,
Hoping glass will contain the uncontrollable.
Before they can begin to drink, a swarm escapes —
Gold-dazzle, noise, honey, sting — a circle
Around each head, a crown of May bees.

Truth has been concealed, like 15th-century meat
 Rotting under its fabric of spices. Seasons
 Have their progression and this is misleading:
 The fool's-gold suitors believe if May had lasted
 They would have found their beloved. Four leave,
 Mourning the march of months, the thwarting procession.
 But Will stays, through winter's seeming stasis
 When blood becomes manageable, to have the Honey Queen again.

This year, no one knows why — a record snowfall? the drift of
 Lava ash over the sun? fatigue, sheer as
 The cliff beside the river? — June does not begin
 On its appointed date. He has not only the month
 But its extension to try to pull the river's winding sheet
 Through his gold ring, the wedding band which
 Plays *The Water Music*. But though he cannot handle
 The river which refuses to be treated like
 A scarf, he finds he knows her.

August discoveries are not the fault of August. Under
 The river's cloak, under the course of its blue blood
 Is a slut, a gutter of water and men. The thirst of love
 Is slaked by cloacal knowledge. What should Will do?
 Cross himself or the river? What can he afford?

He goes to Raleigh to buy the river valley, to build
 The Mother Goose Enchanted Village. No more brooding.
 Between "The Queen is in the parlor eating bread and
 Honey Golden Manse" and "The Jack fell down
 And broke his crown Hill," the water wends. Will has it
 Paved with silver glass, assuring safe reflection; he bends
 To face himself. Through flowered banks the mirrored river curves;
 Underneath, Honey Queen Bess sings her sting green music.