

an edge so it will close,
but he feels he would miss the sound
of it banging against its hinge,
then remaining open in silence like a sail,
propelling the house beyond the town
to wild events in open fields.
It's as if it falls when it closes,
returning in a lull to its jamb.

He is happy this way in the interim,
falling asleep each night
in exactly the same way.
If the door breaks, he'll buy another,
or better yet, fix it.
He will take perfect measurements of its width
and length and examine its damage of splinters
with gentle hands.
He will mold it back into shape,
then wait for the heat of summer
to expand it again.
Until the door blows off
on a sleepless night,
he will take advantage of conditions.

FROM THE APOCRYPHA OF DAVID

I wish I could die like Moses
gazing at the Promised Land.
I envy him that death atop Mt. Pisgah,
so scenic and self-fulfilling.
Lying here now beneath my palms
I ache inside from more than gout.
My palace is a huge luxurious joke.

As if my dotage weren't enough reward,
I am haunted by giants and women —
the women appear
whenever I dream
and laugh at everything I have to say.
I remember them in every detail,
their blemishes, their smiles.
They are Lilith, I know, ageless,
still beautiful, destroying my mind.
They are naked bathers
who love the sun.
They are married women
with husbands at the front.
They are a wilderness
without a mountain or any way out.

As for the giants,
there's usually just one,
but sometimes another, his identical twin.
They pretend to be dead
face down in the dust
but then stand up
with their severed heads raised high like trophies.
I wonder what else I have to do to kill them
for good.
My servants tell me they're just a dream.

Sheol is like a weight around my neck.
Why couldn't I at least have died
with Jonathan — he was so young
and dearer to me than any woman.
Have I lived so long
only to see my family disintegrate?
Absalom slain and Tamar raped?
If I had known my life would end like this
I would have stayed in the fields
and let my brothers go.

Samuel had a cursing eye
which Saul and Eli knew
but how was I to know,
still just a boy with only a lyre
and stupid courage?

“Sing to us, old king,” the women cry,
“we long to hear your broken heart
before it stops.”

Anything to chase them out.

My wind is short
but my mind still sharp.

“Love just one,” I repeat.

“One either burns or he doesn’t.

I have loved you all as one.

Forgive me, but you seemed that way,
unlike God.

Your faces were different but opened
the same.

I have suffered from this all my life,
gazing at Sharon through pretty eyes.

It didn’t seem to matter at the time,
one God, one woman, one life.

I failed one of these
and therefore all.”

My servants have sent for a beauty today
to test my strength.

Her name is Abishag.

I brought it on myself.

I will let them bring her to me
if they must.

It makes a good story.

Finally I’m not ashamed.

What better way to abdicate my crown?

I remember my childhood friends
and the back streets of Bethlehem
and the pasture's steps of grazing trails
and the songs I sang to sleepless Saul
and the jokes that Jonathan and I used to tell
and the one thing I'll never tell:
how slaying Goliath awakened my lust,
my monstrous love borne of a lucky shot
and better kept a secret for the record's sake.
But what I felt there, looking down
on his unconscious body was my first holy desire,
my groin uncoiling to my core.
Mercy left me then, and I cut off his head.
Though impotent now, I can still recall
how the sight of him detached from his shoulders,
bloody and pagan, entered my soul like a woman.
From then on the two would be the same,
although I could never say this, especially to a woman.
I am thinking, however, of telling Abishag
since the last should know.