

HEATHER MACLEOD

I'm Awash because Nothing Ever Changes

for Rebecca Fredrickson

It's a graceful thing to watch the way she holds
emptiness,
how it's left her arms thin, face pale, hands
coiled
inward like she wants to have something to
hold.

Grief has given a different kind of beauty, and
poverty
surprising moments trimmed, bare with clarity.
Last winter when losing him was fresh
as tart green apples in September, she took me
to see

the salmon spawning, eagles feasting over the
shallow
end of the river. I gave her a scarf from
Thailand,
and she laid it across a picnic table, its
brightness,
its square of yellow dejected and out of place.
When I turned from the river, she was drinking
tequila
from her silver flask; and there was a young boy
by the water,
his hands roaring against the head of a salmon,
the eggs

left the salmon flesh like a gasp with each strike.
His hair was a crown of wheat, his eyes so pale
they looked like violets; his mouth a thin, white
line;
small pink eggs lying by his feet. I've never told
her
how I dream the eagles make the shape of her
shadow
with their wings; how I dream the salmon carry
her name
in their bellies like light to the ocean.

Another winter is coming, the sunflowers are
bent over
from the cold; I'll wear the same coat, the one
from the Sally Ann, the pocket needs mending,

the sleeves are worn thin; the house is chilly,
it's raining,
the cats scratch at the door, then curl their soft,
wet bodies over my cold shins, leap up the
ladder,
into the loft, finding her warm body. I open

the door up a crack, just enough to gather the
mail;
I go back to bed, hide all the bills under my
pillow;
emptiness is contagious. When my lover
comes
he brings us ripe plums, dried peaches, a small
bag
of licorice babies; he lies on top of me, over the
covers,
whispering out my name; he tells me he loves
me.
I hear her in the next room as she moves

down the ladder from the loft; I listen to the
cats
scramble along behind. She makes us mugs of
cocoa,
and the three of us curl up in my narrow bed,
until I can't tell whose warmth covers me,
whose soft skin touches me,
whose hand and mouth caress me,
who loves me in the cold morning.

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Heather MacLeod is a Métis poet. She grew up in British Columbia, Alberta, the Yukon, and the Northwest Territories. Coteau Books (Regina) published her first book of poetry, My Flesh the Sound of Rain. Her poems have appeared in most major Canadian literary magazine. She is currently working on a novel.