

To find a new beauty

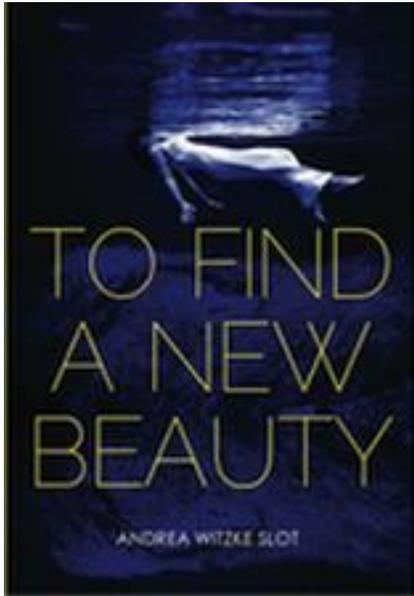
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Penelope Considers

In hours of idle hands, I wonder why
I waited so long. Go on—tell me you were kept
a prisoner on that island. Yes, I'll sigh.

I know better: she steered your humbler fate.
Just what did you crave? Her beauty? Bondage?
Worship? Surely more than immortality tempted

you? Do you think I'm not also human?
I too dream of what could now be mine
had Athena not guided you

back to our bed. Handsome young Ithacans
—not all mere scoundrels—floated through my home,
so dangerously near, in your long absence.

I defended your honor, but do not presume
that every man hovered out of envy
alone: the desert you imagine is not in this room.

I know temptation. Why else would I keep
my restless fingers busy like I did?
Telemachus needed a father. I believed

in waiting for you—me, faithful, forbidden
wife—twenty years of weaving and unweaving
life and need and death—and you, longing to listen,

binding yourself to your mast to stay “true.” Are we
so very different? You who crave enduring
strength too late, as bones and sinews weaken

and fail, you who move toward your chosen end,
pining her lost promises? Calypso frail?
Perhaps. But not you, Odysseus, even

in your late age. And not me. This marriage is not equal
to your death. But nor are you a god, dear, despite
your once-envied charm. You too are simply mortal.

Recall how you returned to me in a beggar's disguise.
What did I unweave then, husband? And why?

V-mail

In 1942, my grandmother sent
letters to the man she loved. In the salt
air of the Pacific, my grandfather read
her eloquence as a long prelude
to sex. We could all tell from his replies.
I gave up writing letters since
the day I read theirs. I learned that patience
was not a virtue I could easily afford.
I learned of speed in a throwaway world
—and abbreviated means of goodbyes.
Who now would take the time to write a letter?
And who would reply if I did? Who'd bother
to wait in an inching post office queue
for a stamp much less a fucking prelude?
Still, a real letter would be a welcome surprise.

□□

Ode to a Bear: Part II

“He’s talking about a girl,” he said.

“He had to talk about something.” McCaslin said.

—William Faulkner, “The Bear,” *Go Down Moses*

You said it would be just the thing we need.
I had my doubts: you knew I hated camping.
We left at five a.m. in gray twilight.
You took my hand and led me down the paths
to places where interruptions and children
do not exist. You set up camp and said,
You watch for bears. I dropped my book between
my knees and peered into the density of trees.
That night we slept curled in one sleeping bag.
I dreamt of Ben, saw Boon’s knife slash his throat.
Lion was ripped to shreds. In this dream
the bear bowed his head before us, shuttered
his yellowed eyes, and sunk to the ground. I turned
to you, reached for you. But you were no longer there.

□□

Intermezzo I

This is the hour of the night
for writing, not reading: the motionless
lid on a lake that has not seen rain for weeks,
the lack of breathing beside me,
the lack of hands to move toward.
Hands caress the strange puzzle of letters,
create here where once there was none,
create here where once there was you.
I write you here beside me, sketch
you into being in the voiceless void
of waiting. It is as close as I can
get at this late hour of in-between.
Fingers feel the keys press back
and I wonder then what is loss.
I wonder then what is touch.
Steady my body into future,
into permanence,
as I attempt to create a landscape
of ribboned movement forward,
then back,
rerouting homecomings,
shortcoming, failings.
Return to me.
Fill this silence
that lies beneath my fingertips.

□□

Hawks Nest, St. John, USVI

They say there is no hope / to conjure you – / no whip of the tongue to anger you – /
no hate of words / you must rise to refute. — H.D., “Sea Gods.”

I

The hills tongue their way to sea
as if the sea begs the land to slide
into its waiting, open mouth.
The slick blue mirror
is deceiving:
with my head beneath
its opaque walls,
I can see for miles.
Every flicker or fin
is a sunspot or rainbow
against such light.

II

I sleep under the empty mast
listening to slim lines bang
against the still night.
From deep inside the intestines
of the Laughing Pelican II,
I look upward and pretend
I am its heartbeat.
I know better. It knows better.

III

The curved white hand
catches the wind. Our
boat lifts forward, leaning
into the blue of merged sea and sky.
We concede to what we believe
to be the boat's assured power.
The sea and wind know better.

□□