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Thoreau's Fossil Lilies

Brenda Hillman

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Orange / Lee Van Demarr

for Linda

This grainy orange, stringent and cold
From the icebox, lies in segments,
Its skin in stories of hemispheres,
Dismembered dreams of the sun, stacked
Loosely on the table. The clock beats.
Already the plum, purple as an old
King, is gone and soon this orange
Will be gone. Fruit for breakfast,
You said it would be delicious:
It was almost too sweet,
The juice strong and distant as white
Kitchens. In the mountains you were
Sure-footed, your eyes deep as Chinese
Enamel, I couldn't chip away any blue
Or burn or dissolve into orange juice.

Thoreau's Fossil Lilies / Brenda Hillman

"We find ourselves in a world already planted . . ."
A Writer's Journal

Years later, critics would be saying
you had to look just off, in parallax,
to see your own face in that
"filthy pond."

They'd be calling you names
they could not afford to gauge
their own needs by.
Truth was, you'd found

these lilies; they made you forget
John Brown, sweet gale,
and pickerel dart.
They were rock, but they were

flowers, laughing at the corners
of their centuries;
frozen at one time
but now, little cauldrons

of history.
I imagine you bending over them,
suddenly amazed.
Putting them into your satchel

to hoard wonder and shyness
as if they were wives.
And on the banks of the pond,
an old choir

of elms, singing from
the frozen earth as you passed.
To the rest of the world, friend,
those lilies were fresh.

Fettuccine / Brenda Hillman

for JF

The pasta drips down in degrees,
slung over a cord to dry in various lengths,
a strange pipe organ, bleached white.

He smells his grandmother's house
in the bowl. The dough hardens, but he forces
submission, with a rolling pin;

they'll soften by our suppertime.
And where he hangs them, the air
looks slashed and yellowed, old papers

or stalactites in a well-lit cave.
They'll stand up on their own
till they're cooked down.

Meanwhile, what creamy
splinters in our home! What unique bones!
As if his whole past bared its teeth at once.

And he puts his face close, into the dough,
to sense how much he's grown. And with
what sticks he is staving off hunger.