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Two Poems · Frances Mayes

GOOD FRIDAY, DRIVING HOME

Not travelling; getting there. Traffic pouring into blinding light. But the fog looks enlightened, roiling over the hills. Angels might appear in a chariot with news of the open-ended universe. The groove I’ve worn down this road. Back lit sky, are houses near the coast blazing? My mind drags the pavement like a string of tin cans. There, those beautiful horses, six, seven, grazing along the reservoir. One is a palomino. Of course, of course they remind me. The sight, ice on the heart. Memory, that guerrilla keeps lighting smoky fires. Those lost could do worse than be recalled by horses in spring grass, could do worse than own all shaded streets, lilacs, crescent moon, and sailboats. Who do I think they are, saints, with their emblems? I’m affected by silvered sky, this drastic day mad with traffic. Years gone I memorized Donne: *Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,*  
*That thou may’st know mee, and I’ll turne my face.*  
Westward, westward, things in motion stay in motion. I roll down the window, watch for cars swerving to the wrong lane. So many of us alone. Compact. Good mileage. We fail and can tell ourselves nothing. We break apart and invent why. We place our faith. Lose track. Blinker flashing, keep left. I am totally emptied and must fill myself again. The racing of powerful, unlovely emotions. What is the endless world? Comes around again the cusp of summer.
I still like linen. Peach colored linen. I think of tanning my legs. I feel the word prayer in my mind. Just the word. A smooth river stone.
I'm accomplishing the miles to San Francisco for the thousandth time, add them to my vita.
I'm better off than Mona's mother with her hair in curl papers thirty years, waiting for the occasion.
I have occasion. Press on. Oh soul of mud.
Half of what sacrifice ransoms us?

**WHEN RAIN PULLS THE WIND OFF THE ARNO AT NIGHT**

Thunder booms through the house like waves boom at sea when the mast is a twig, booms like the avalanche that took Vera at Annapurna, riveting her blue jacket to a crevice of ice, booms like my father's voice warning me not to bathe when it thunders, lightning waits to strike girls with pearly toes and sunburned shoulders, and will split the room, lift the porcelain tub and my white hide to the sky;
    a flash divides the night in my closed eyes, the sky a bare dendritic slide of winter birch—what long roots dangle. I hold my breath.
But isn't it good, the gigantic storm? Waking to the flood of terror they felt by fires in the caves? I find a match but the candle displaces the dark only half way up the wall. I ricochet home—heat lightning in the South. I used to lie on the ground letting rain soak through me, feeling each bright burst of forked silver.
Quick wind parts the bedroom shutters,