

Instructions to the Diver

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i.

To reach that depth of love
where every phrase flashes cold
affront and your voice
packed by black atmospheres
spurts like brine to leach
flesh and all affections

Proceed by way of exaggeration:

Echo no lover's word
without giving it spin,
imagining complaint or slight
while smiling in the cool
hypocrisy of your revision

Do not be afraid to find a kindness criminal
(I promise you, this will work)
nor wait for a word of peace
and twist it till it shrills. . .

And when the speaker, who loves you,
balks at your mishearing
be prepared to plead ignorance
and seal the doors of your vessel,
giving no access to reason
in your game of quick descent.
With little perceptible movement
you will be launched,
a tiny bubble of awareness making for the abyssal plain,
the beggar's lantern of your bathyscaphe
drowning in a fashionable black.

ii.

The first descent, they say,
is worst: a suffocation comes
slowly, a smallness creeps on
when points of reference swirl
up in the luminous gullet.
One wants stars
at least,
waystations,
but there is nothing,

the odd fish flashing
in the lights
too flimsy or freakish for comfort.

Many souls bolt for the surface,
contrite,
and swear they will not go down
again: the burst of joy
when the hatch flies open on a choppy golden sea
seals the decision
but later, in fond remembrance,
draws them back to the deep

For there is no other way
to jubilate so sharply.
No, be taut,
the lore is wrong:
First descents
are only the start
of a terror whose pull will grow
until one night
(it is always night below)
your hull will grind
into silt strewn by eons of deaths
and, with a groan and shudder,
burst like an egg beneath a boot.
And this will be your end,
and the end of something
or someone you nearly loved.

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