

LAUREN K. WATEL

When I Was Young

When I was young I had many enemies. I prayed for vengeance night and day, but the gods didn't hear me, and my enemies flourished. As I grew older my desire for vengeance weakened, as did my enemies. By the time I reached old age I no longer sought revenge but craved rest and peace. I died happily, wishing my enemies well. When I arrived in the lands beyond life, I found that the gods had heard my prayers after all. There were my enemies, every last one, and some I didn't even remember, nor the wrongs they had done me. For each of them the gods had devised a punishment, this one more diabolical and torturous than the last, and all of them to the end of time. The screams—they were beyond imagining, and so loud.

Miracle of Mine

Miracle of mine, how I lie here in my naked finery, half-dreaming in the former night of my youth. The clock blinks on and off. Leaf blowers drone in monklike harmony. A dog barks. The sun cheerfully blares through my high windows as if trumpets were announcing the royal procession of my waking. But I haven't woken up yet. At least, not in the metaphorical sense. I'm still asleep, wrinkled across the sheets, legs crossed, skin drooping, hair all agray. Blind, stupid, flabby and useless. And let's not forget the pain, the pain is like luggage I'm stuck carrying all day along those endless moving sidewalks that shunt you from one vague place to another. My mouth is glued shut and my ears are gummed up and I'm wiping the dreams from the corners of my eyes. I can hardly see in the merciless light. Now the dread settles

over me like a soft rain, with that damp, fresh smell, the dread drying in a film on my skin. Barely perceptible, but it's there all right. Is that what's making my skin seem so loose? Is that what's making my hair turn white? No that's age, that's time, that's death, creeping up on me like my least favorite playmate, the one I don't remember inviting over. Maybe my mom invited death without asking me first. That would be typical.

Go By, Go By

Go by, go by. Reds go by, yellows go by, float away and go by, go by. Blues go by and the greens, too, float away and go by. The dust and the petticoats, the foundlings and the amputees, go by, float away and go by. The world is floating away. Go by, world, go by, off into the outer realms, off into the superfluous futures, which are branching continuous, like ivy sending tendrils across the floorboards. Go by, futures, float away and go by. Raise your sails and skim the waters, jigger and jugger across the ice-cracked oceans, shiver toward the poles, turn blue and solidify, futures, and go by, go by. Go by, oranges, go by, lemons, drip-drop and go by, past the lemonade stand and the fallen pennies, past the dump with its smell of rot and uselessness, past the old house where the palm tree used to grow, past the mailbox sinking into earth, past the lake and the stuffed game posed on hind legs, teeth bared, past the gated mansions that used to be a golf course, past the mall and the movie houses and the expressway with its dangerously short on-ramps, go by, go by, float away and go by. We've heard there's a river in town, though we've never seen it, so we stand on the edge of a rumored river and look into the rumored water, into the muck and the rubber, into the weedy wet, our faces wavering over the water's oily skin, ourselves spread across the river's roof like so many shingles. Beneath our faces are rocks and tiny fluttering fishes, and the greens, there they go, the greens go by, and the browns go by, go by, the darks and the lights go by, float away and go by, but our wavering faces remain.