

Meanwhile, What the Dead Suggest

Time is always a woman, too,  
    behind and ahead of the heroes who  
        escape while we're left to cast terrifying beauties:  
            nightshade, icicles, lullabies, all the babies,  
  
blue stars that dart, love's ships which go smashing  
    into the bricks of our domestic days. Girl washing  
        her feet in the train station sink. Blood scrubbed by  
            those on marrow bones. Kneel a while, then rise,  
  
read, eat, twist, kiss a bit in the sheets at night,  
    bring the past to the present, our futures in sight:  
        when we shrug into ghosts, who stays and plans,  
            runs kingdoms, bakes cakes, keeps clocks with no hands?

Who's most plausible, mythical man or a mother,  
    one with suitors (maybe turned lovers). Let's face one another,  
        come in closer (yum). We daughters were tossed in the sea,  
            braced for death, then rescued miraculously (by ducks!), just to be  
  
made wives waiting endlessly, dutifully? Um, wait.

(No thanks.)

    Okay, living in wait versus living: the first, hideous stillness,  
    weaving, unweaving straight to the grave. Second, delicious  
  
motion, chance hot as hundreds of suns, mad rush forward toward, oooh, look—

    a horizon of glittery faithlessness, where naked, we summon a flock  
    of ducks, save not just kids, but all we've made (take quick stock):

language itself, desire, beds, work, stories, hell (ourselves). Hold onto loves,  
    as many and as sinful as compose your private joy. Fear riots in us,  
        yes, but we'll be shadows soon, what words we saved mere leaves  
            on fire, ash. Clouds take our shape just to dissipate, please

    dance with me in the meantime. The dead suggest it, remark on darkness,  
    so dial up light, lift your curtain, skirt, pen, spear, lip-gloss, join my chorus

of multiple selves, the nymph, queen, villain is each of us. I wear a snake,  
    too, am the oracle (since you ask). I hold a mop, am a maid.  
        I am a god sometimes I mumble. I'm a little blurry, hurt,  
            it's true, but neither lipless nor voiceless yet, the dirt

still lusts to settle on my bones. I shout: Girls! Women!  
    Be unlike water—stop— resist. If it means sweetly, no singing like a siren.  
        Swivel your heads (intolerably beautiful) and scream  
            like owls we're meant to be, 360 degrees we see, all of history!

--Rachel DeWoskin  
For "The Penelopiad"