

Quiet

by Jane Flett

He says, The way to get what you want is stop wanting so much, because your heart is a hungry horse and you need to learn to walk it to the coral and tell it when to quit.

She says, I don't have the bones for standing still, I can't, even a bent knee feels folded for the starter block and how do you teach elastic bands they're better not to ping?

He says, Sit still, sit stiller, stop. Your breath is a snake swallowing a snake tail regurgitating a snake. Your breath is a circle. Forget the ins and exes and learn to just hale.

She sits and she waits while the oil of oranges turns to whispers in the cracks of the wind.

She sits and she smells springtime and her heart is not a quiet thing, her heart is not the supine bough of a contented oak waiting and watching as the seasons twist.

She sits and the oranges say take this, take time, take a chance, take cover.

She sits and listens.

She sits.

Everywhere the world is full of things and she is convinced her job is to let these things worry her the way a piece of grit worries the soft mouth flesh of an oyster in the pebbled ocean bed. Is this what you mean when you talk about sitting? She will open her mouth and let the things into her own soft flesh and when they embed in these bleeding gums, she will wait it out. Angry pink ulcers. The head of a dagger wedged deep like skin is another part of the ocean bed, like her mouth is another part of the world. Saliva will gather and waiting will turn these things. From the grits and gripes of the universe into cold white pearls.

He says, There is nothing else to this but the sensation of air

travelling through space in the tiny galaxy between your mouth and your nose.

She is quiet and thinks of rockets, of meteors, of hurtling, she would like to be hurtling, will he notice if she hurtles? She is quiet and thinks, Explosions go bang.

He says, Listen, he breathes in, he says, That, he breathes out, he is his own circling snake, he has galaxies tucked Alice-style under his tongue.

She is scared of the silence because perhaps the silence is a morbid tenant who, once the door is open, will move into her house to stay. She is scared that the attic, chests stuffed with fragments of poems, corners dusty with metaphor, will become his domain.

She is scared he will lock the door from the inside.

She is scared of losing the key.

She is scared.

What if it is not her turn to be quiet? Have you heard the stories of the Underworld, an angry dog with three heads, the River Styx? She believes these stories are wandering like ancient souls looking for the place to cross in a sturdy wooden boat. If she closes her mouth, how will they get at the coin, how will they pay the boatman? She does not want her stories to spend eternity wrestling in the muddy waters for want of a guide, for want of a gold coin, for want of her loudness and wide mouth, for want of her yells. Perhaps it is her turn to be Charon and take to the water. But what would silence sound like in that long dark wait?

He says, You think too much and he grins a grin that has all of the attic keys on a wrought iron ring, on a chain.

He says, Here and he hands her the galaxies and the snakes and a pomegranate and a coin.

He says, Hush, and she lets out a long breath, the one with all the hooves just beneath the surface.

They sit there, quietly, for a while.

