

RISHMA DUNLOP

Reading Amy Lowell

Summer and I have returned to the town where
I was a young wife
where we raised our daughters.

The name of the place means *a place to live forever*.
Mythology and daily life. Legends of sea serpents,
ghosts of horses lost swimming in from the island, tangled with
slow-pitch tournaments, ballplayers and Winnebago campers,
tourists on the beaches and lunching at wineries.

Today I am marking freshman English papers in the backyard.
The air is sweet and fugitive. In the garden, wild strew of roses,
pink blooms amidst the silver foliage of planted pathways
fragrance spilling from their thorn beds,
the morning stillness stung by the
screeching of Steller's jays and flocks of crows
singing a crude chorale.

In the distance, the sound of ducks landing on the swimming pool,
splashing and flapping their wings.
My daughters laugh and I am struck by that particular radiance
again and again how the laughter of girls
cuts through blue air.

remembering how a grown woman can brush back her hair in moonlight,
watch her husband and daughters inside her house as if in a dream.

Remembering days when the woman wakes up and she understands her skin
doesn't fit her anymore.

What she does inside that skin leaves
her outside her house in long nights of crickets
singing and the lake whispering.

Sometimes, she longs to be like characters in a novel or a poem,
the relief of flatness on paper.

The heart is literate.
It wants to read the pages it has unfurled.
It wants the grip of roses on love-ridden afternoons,
the ordinary TV, chair, table, plate, sneakers
entangled through a sky of blood tracery swept innocent by rain.

I want conversation that is like the stripped truth of the poem,
the way I felt when I first read Amy Lowell's "Patterns."
Over the years I wondered what kind of shelter
I could make with words.
I search for the color of home in the extravagance of reading.
I am looking for it still.

This town is not a place for introspection. Such beauty.
The lake, the blue air, the sun, all defy me
to find some fault in this horizon.

Over the years I weaned my babies, got ready to walk
into the pink and silver light.