

# *Thinking About a Female Neurologist's Drowning*

BY JEAN KIM

My heart was broken near this Canton pier, so I can see  
Why she drifted here, this quiet harbor. There's beauty  
In the dissonance, the looming rusted ships and docks

Framing gentle water, the street ending, sloping under  
The water's edge, so one could drive right in, and sail.  
She lost her love in May, and slid under in November,

Burdens brewing in her mind. She'd always traced  
The spindly wiring of neurons, the Purkinje cells,  
The deep forest of axonal grief, inescapable like nets

That ensnare memories like smiling dolphins, choking  
In an electric soup of tears. Was it too much to give  
To everyone everyday, tending the frayed ends

Of faulty work by God, the victims slowly freezing  
Into deadened limbs, or cords quickly yanked  
From sockets, leaving the Christmas tree half-lit?

Would anyone know how much she poured heart-blood  
Into the holes in other organs, so they'd beat again?  
So when he left, she had nothing left. Or so I guess,

Since I've dived into similar bays, chilly enticement  
By my siren sisters, singing and luring us to oblivion.  
Steps away, I work at a nursery for broken minds.

Grandma proudly declares she is turning 100; her cheeks  
Ruddy with youth's last embers; the chart says she's only  
90. Bedside photos show her in Army service, proud

Like Vivien Leigh. She says again, she is turning 100.  
Grandpa shouts every few minutes, like a cuckoo clock.  
Other times he grins like a Gerber baby, drooling.

A nasal assault indicates the need for a diaper change.  
Still I would cling to the cobbled bits of history,  
Even though I know what lies ahead, like mothers

Soothing their children on Auschwitz trains.  
I would choose to march onward, defiant before  
The lashing waves, the churning sea, the agonal gasps

Of an unraveling psyche. But the loneliness  
Is another matter. It was hot in his Canton rowhouse,  
Those summer days. My killer called me inside.

The fires of the heart turn suns into stars into ice.  
Lust coupled with lies is a form of murder.  
So I stand at the pier, this November morn.

There's beauty in the enjambment of marina  
And industry, these Roman ruins of shipping routes  
Where explorers and lovers and thieves cry out.

This tattered diorama stays, even after our eyes shut.  
The harbor runs deep, primordial soup,  
This repository of unanchored dreams.

# VERTIGO

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*He saw her in her absence,  
The golden coif so tight it killed,  
The porcelain death mask flawless.  
She sashayed in grey seersucker--  
Gorgeous succubus, radiant Venus,  
Always a step behind like Eurydice--  
Before the bay, brash against red metal.  
The gate to hope, to love they said  
But for others the last leap blind.  
She fell too, a perfect spiral,  
Infinity crushing into a spot,  
The eye I thought I could fill.*

*In I stepped, halting automaton.  
Under marble, my skin swelled live.  
Here my hair flared, flaxen raven,  
My syllables raw like a secretary's  
But swathed in socialite silk,  
As I fed from your desperation  
To rescue, to bind, to save.  
I felt the sun from your eyes,  
Salted warmth in my bosom.  
I knew it was a mirror trick,  
That I was merely the prism,  
As the light fell in the hole.*

*A photograph captures light--  
 Crude catch on paper, still precious.  
 A reverse negative, what is that?  
 A ghoulish strip of dissonant color,  
 But it came from life all the same.  
 You would discard me, backwards,  
 Even if the original was me,  
 Even if the source reflected me.  
 You wanted her, the paper  
 Traced with your words, your sighs.  
 I was a mummy shrouded by  
 Spirals of love in verse.*

*I let you carve me like Galatea,  
 My limbs sparked red by chisels.  
 My hair boiled in acid like my heart,  
 As you wanted ice tinged gold.  
 I would do it, melt and meld--  
 It was me, didn't you know?  
 It was never her.  
 But I bent; the twist broke my back,  
 Like a young tree's branches  
 Crackling in crisp spring wind.  
 As long as you were touching me,  
 I loved that you killed me.*

*A shell is always turning.  
 The mind's antic mimics itself--  
 The images repeating, multiplying  
 Carbon copies like Warholian death.  
 Obsession revives as it murders--  
 It was always her.  
 It was never me.  
 I feel you letting go--  
 Her shadow frees us--  
 I fall in a spiral--  
 She is yours,  
 And I am forever.*