



FIRST TRIP THROUGH THE AUTOMATIC CARWASH

Clamped to another will, the self in its glass
begins a slow, tugged slide, toward what clarifying?
First the world had rolled in clinging crystal, then a deface
of gripping gray was spread by others, drying
to smear and mottle that threatened her own movement.
This strange detour is a clear necessity.
Drenching and blindness signal the first improvement.
This much is familiar, natural as rain would be
after the lights blow out, filling any pane
or cornea with hopelessness that will go away
after its little havoc, disclosing sunshine,
and how long it will last no one is expected to say.
But now this snail-spin, in neutral, sends her in a fierce
forest whose long dark leaves wrap her in a wild
and waving threat, a typhoon that is all hers,
swabbing to get in, as the storms of a child
threaten the very skin of the child, its frail
shell of self-regard. In mercy, this ends.
And now begins a scouring away at the braille
of outward features, a terrible wish that contends
with the speaking shapes of what she is and has been,
a spinning scrub that seems to aim for bare bone.
To destroy the customary in order to let in
something unwitnessed yet, and be wholly alone
for its witnessing, seems to be the aim of this stage.
What is whirling away? The long wedlock,
its bolt ground loose? Or the whole safe cage
of sane connections? Or, from beneath, a bedrock
trust in words, their grounding for her very name?
Whatever is left is suddenly released, a few
deep breaths can be taken before she's jerked to the same
dark jungle of thrashing fronds as before, but with new
insistence. Something refuses to be withstood.
Its untamed, zigzag, dark rubbing will break through.

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You *will* change, it squeaks, I replace old selfhood.
As the newly beloved asks of the lover, Who?,
as nouns rinsed of meaning ask What?, as in panic and daze
the patient asks Where?, she strains for a shape to define.
Whatever it is will enter everywhere, rephrase
everything. At the last moment it lifts toward design.
The heart makes its presence known, disheveled but whole,
by jogging in place, lithely, at light's surprise.
A hoot from behind makes her shift to self-control,
and the muddle of everywhere falls on her clearing eyes.