

Davi Loren

Stopping with Nana

At first, Nana says nothing at all.
We stare up into the clutching twigs,
trace back through branches, through trunk,
the gnarled fists of root at our feet
"It looks poured into place," she says
And in a way, it does: A shard of energy
piercing the vacuum
plummeting toward the planet;
slowed to liquid in thickness of air
thickened to stone at touch of earth
shackled at last to root

Nana is much younger in my photo of her,
an ordinary-looking woman, I suppose,
wavy dark hair in a knot
She holds my mother and aunt in her lap:
two squirming daughters nearly her size
Her spine presses stiff to the chairback,
eyes in shadow, body thick
from the mulelike strain of nurture

You wouldn't know her to see her today
as she studies the swirling bark
Like a sheet over last summer's furniture
her flesh drapes her bones,

thinned to a rosepetal peach membrane
Through it gleam the overlapping edges of organs
threaded together in trails of blue
tidily packaged in ribs, ready for travel
When she opens her mouth, the breeze
trickles and bobs through wind-chime chords
Wispy white hair, more breath than fiber
shimmers around her skull
and her characteristic darkness of eye
has given way to reflection

Already she weaves in and out of the form
She no longer lives in organs,
in face nor fingers,
heart nor mind —
she draws her breath
from between

And she turns to me now and she smiles
and her hand drifts upward without displacing
a single particle of air
I feel the awakened anticipation
in her heart's swift beat
Ready At any moment
to slip into light

Theropods

How they would have laughed—
if they could have perceived the joke

those walnut-brained claw-toed
two-storeyed carnivores
with barely the smarts
to spot a good meal

how could they have guessed?
though the possibility
stalked through the sludge along with them
ever-ready to emerge
ta-da into the spotlight

they never would have believed,
laying boulder eggs
in clay-thickened swampsoil,
rolling cozily in saunabath air

Even if they had possessed the intellect
of orangutans or elephants or men
and had been rounded up, herded into
the UA-6, given a slide show
with Pepsi and popcorn
3-D glasses and snowcones on the house

and presented with Verifiable Scientific Proof,
lectured at by paleontological experts,
while they fidgeted and clawed,
belched and bullied

till they wanted to eat their chairs
out of sheer cognitive frustration;

even if the brightest of them rose,
tail smacking right and left along the aisle,
to approach the microphone
Even if this precocious Prehistoric
took the time to explain to the others
carefully, slowly, repeating the tricky parts

and even if a few leapt from their seats
flinging their popcorn and singing "Eureka!"

too many would have hissed and hooted,
railed at the ushers, stampeded the manager
to protest
the ludicrous suggestion

that eating and mating
and the press of time
would transform them to
needle-beaked sprites
darting between leaves, disappearing
here, reappearing
there, turning the air
to a hum

drawing life not in carnage
but in droplets
from the clear liquid nectar
of a bloom

Three Views of a Painting:

“Madame Cezanne in the Conservatory,” c. 1890

1. As a Still Life

“Does an apple move?”

You chide your beleaguered Hortense
into holding the pose for the full afternoon

Obediently, she recedes into her pupils
and wills her muscles to sleep
She sinks into her chromosomes
gropes for amphibian memory
of blood cool enough to slow
the splitting of cells
She stretches wide
the throat of each minute
to swallow the inexhaustible hours
of your brush

so that you may paint the face
of an apple Without seeing
the weariness Without seeing how
rapidly she ages
doing nothing

As if this orphaned straining moment
could contain all of Hortense,
and immortality could be touched
through the stilling of a life

2. As a Landscape

A dark-robed mountain
purples the shade of a tree,
fertilizing dusty soil

Ochre wall and sky
bleed through complexion
The grass, reflected
strokes the passive jaw

Arms circle through fingers
in the valley of a lap
and her face rises
indifferent as the moon

3. As a Portrait

His subject is objects
He has no interest
in capturing the soul
in paint

Which suits them both
She does not wish
to be caught

And yet, in marriage and art
they are bound
For decades she sits
hands knotted, face tinged,
mind on vacation in Paris
while he labors to produce
forty portraits

Forty chalky masks
conceal the married woman
Forty crisp and distancing masks

Only here, in "The Conservatory"
she breaks the pose
She turns her face
toward his
The brush, faltering,
strokes the fleeting warmth
which blushes at the edge of her ear

His sympathy for their bondage
glimmers in the pigment
of her eyes