

Properties of Water

Nancy Baird

In the dark,
a cat will fly on rain-slicked blacktop
like a bat,
hydroplaning, flicking malevolence sideways
out of fluorescent eyes.

Nevertheless,
the streets will wash clean here,
as in the desert they never do

never have
except once
in visions, holy water
crept, silent as a shroud
down the steps of an altar,
seeped under an east gate like
smoke through a brass grate,
steadfastly claimed carved steps,
parched land,
salty sea,
washed them clean as fish.

From the air, islands are scaled,
silver and emerald, and beyond them
the great waters of the planet tip
like gleaming wings.
The seas roll on hidden reefs and
stream to the west
in shifting gold and indigo planes,
drawing in the racing light as a fistful
of sins, cleaned and clarified.

On this island in March,
the sea is vengeful
and murderous,
but the rain is steady on the back roads;
and on your flesh pours
a streaming second skin,
quicksilver, trailing as you run,
sloughing off your smallness;
for in Hana,
seven drops of rain
will fill your hand.