

Ann Fisher-Wirth

Dream Cabinet

1.

Soft rain. Skies white-gray the same as the water. I lie in the bottom bunk beneath a green-striped blanket here on Fogdö. I've wakened from a nightmare, taut with fear.

2.

And when I dream, what then? What, when the bombs are falling on Beirut and Haifa?

At the conference, Lyn from Haifa said, *Nearly half my students are Arabs, the other half Israeli.*

When it gets really bad, I go to the sea and watch the fishing boats. Nothing has changed in their lives forever.

3.

Two days ago, we were still in Scotland—
the hottest day in the UK ever. A columnist
in the paper wrote of people's hideous fashions:
*Better get used to dressing well when it's hot;
after all, we'll have to cope with worse.*

Cope? We'll choke, gasp, muffled.
Cry out, the trees are vanishing,
the blistering heat is rising. We will tip
the planet past the healing point and then—
Don't they know death wins, and flesh

can be zapped fried seared, wars first for oil
then for stolen water, wars for air not just food?
Death will be the kind one, yet so plenteous
our gizmos there will be no silence, no darkness
even in death. Death, a brightly lit parking lot—

4.

How to be a muddy field, rank with germs,
unseemly?

Here at Fogdö there is beauty.
Bushes thick with blueberries
scatter among boulders.

But the dream-phrase jumps in my mind:

There's a choked chicken loged against the heart chakra.

5.

What do we dream

What do we dream

Be advised
I do not exist

If you are characters in my play
it does you no harm.

Daughter, mother, wife—
what am I but passages of light
through wave, illuminating
intransigence,

and bread cupped in a palm,
water through hands
that feel and cherish with the fingertips
each slick of leaf, each bent branch

as it flows or drifts into infinity—
The rabbits we saw in the field in Scotland

hopped off to their nests beneath bushes
as sun hovered toward twilight over the river,
the limestone town, hill with distant cattle.

6.

On the outhouse walls at Fogdö:

A map of Norrtälje that shows Fogdö
at the upper edge, facing out to Alands Hav,
and, scattered all along, the thousands
of islands that form the Stockholm Archipelago.

A print of soldiers called *Det ivre or iure
af ett Soldattalt*. Many children's drawings,
including a Polynesian maiden complete
with sword, grass skirt, coconut brassière,

and palm tree. A kangaroo, by Susa.
Ballerinas, warriors, monsters. A very
friendly hedgehog. A bright pastel with beach
umbrella, grapes, a Cubist face, a guitar

like a split papaya. Many bright splotches.

7.

—Sleep, says the sea, sleep, says the sea, the birds
thicken in the trees as light glints across the water.

A breeze. Late afternoon, the light growing pewter,
soft Falun red of the ramshackle summer house

soaking up shadows. Out on the water, a motorboat.
I would like to spend the curve of a year

from bird cherries to mushrooms, *svamp*, in Sweden.
Trace the circle round through lilacs, king's-blood-lilies,

lilies of the valley, then blueberries, strawberries,
raspberries, then lingonberries, apples.

To gather them as they ripen, wander along
with that rapt purposeful emptiness, every sense alert

for a glimpse of red or blue, the scrotal sponginess
of puffballs, luminescence of chanterelles.

To know this place in the foison of its seasons.

And watch the light on water, day after day,
empty out of my everlasting self-regard.
Let the sunlight, fog, or rain have its will with me.

8.

At Fogdö, I thought, the silence of myself
would come back to me. But Frida's children
cry as evening comes, and love's no easier
here where blueberries ripen on shin-high
bushes and wild strawberries nestle, sparse,
in the roadside ditches. Love's no easier
for Frida, our hostess, her new lover absent,
she grows thinner every day. She tells us,
*Here you may take coffee, and here,
on this bench, you may sit for romance.*
The cove is quiet; the sky and sea
beyond the pines, one pewter blue.

9.

Can't you stay awake one night
to watch the sky that never turns black

grow light again? Can't you stay
awake one night to hear the soft rain?

10.

Where I live they are paving the world.
The oaks they're "saving" perish,
hemmed in by concrete. Dogwoods parch
and wither in a season of no rain.
You'd think we'd think
of the collapse of systems—
at a certain point, there's nothing
to be done, technology cannot save us.
Earth sickens and sickens, and finally
turns mean. Only things with thorns survive.

11.

I'm reading Kandinsky, he speaks about green
as the resting point between yellow and blue,

the color of tranquility and regeneration.
Surrounded by trees and water here at Fogdö, I want

to be writing of peace, want to be moving into that deeper
harmony where earth and sea and sky seep into, into,

every pulse of my blood. But to write of peace
right now is to be a tourist. She whose color

and income buy her easy passage. She for whom peace
means comfort. She for whom aging means smaller.

12.

Outhouse:

Here, at eight, when Frida's children go to sleep,
it's still soft daylight. Gulls are crying over the inlet.

And now they stop. It's absolutely silent—so silent
I can hear the spiders crawl on my pen across the page,
and each drop of pee falling in the bucket.

Yes, this is 2006, it's not escape and not evasion:
the just-so of water, light, and silence.

13.

Now the *lip, lip, lip* of the quiet water between the islands.

How to paint water?—the tiny ripples flowing
from right to left—and the islands
stretching away, each with its own tranquility.

To live here through the seasons, be of this place,
like the sea captain buried in the graveyard:

what battening down would it take, to survive winters?
In the distance, light catches a couple of tiny buildings,
and smoke rises, or is it a plume of clouds,

far on the horizon. Little color in this scene—pearly gray, charcoal gray, swan's-down, pine green; all twilit—

On the water, an orange float partly hidden by grasses.

14.

The voice says—
Hear what I say to you.

When the dream cabinet finally opens,
two ravens will fly out

and each will seize one of your eyes.
I am not apart from that pain.

In that moment you will see me.

15.

A day of small birds and sunlight.

Last night we sat with Frida in the red house
where her children were sleeping, and she lit candles.

Suddenly I remembered our year in Sweden,
remembered it not just with the mind, but with my whole being,

that poignancy of night, and candles. Such a settling-in,
points of light against all the night sky and all the woods,

stretching North: your thought deepens and deepens
and for once you can sit still. Sweden, and such longing—

walking down Drötningsgatan in Uppsala each winter twilight,
toward the Fyris River, and Peter walking up to meet me,

then linking arms, walking home, home by six p.m. and dinner,
then the hours till sleep stretching wide. Then, gulping sleep,

unable to fall far enough, deep enough, into the gathering darkness—

16.

Now Julia, five, is singing
La la la la la la la la la la la.

And Logan, two,
tosses pebbles into the ocean,
chants *Bye bye weewee, bye bye weewee.*

17.

Kind summer, facing west as sun goes down.
The ducks still bob about the water, the Baltic opens up

between the islands, and the body grows calm
in its own contingencies. On the pier at Fogdö

a woman sits—a woman who is I—
and the sun shatters in a path across the water.

The ducks drift to and fro, and a few birds
honk and chirp, shriek and coo.

One motorboat's revving back across the water.
A spiderweb stretches like a line of laundry

from a rock to the pier, catches the slant of diminishing daylight.
Now the ducks are swimming home,

the little ones in front of their elders. Flies buzz my head.
Frida has just come out to wash Logan's bottle.

Amazing, to trust the world so much
you'll wash your baby's bottle in the ocean—

18.

Writing

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Be free. In Swedish, *Var frei.* Prospero
says, I will not marshal you any longer.
And at the same time

drowns his book

those loops and scrolls
 those cross-hatchings and bent sticks
clumsily woven baskets that hold meaning
 releases them

they unweave they unloop

 see the pages
bits of print bits of cursive
 still ghostly visible

rise like Ariel (rise like April)

 And now Prospero grows old, is silent

 and now all around us the white looping air.

19.

 You're not coming, are you,
god of ferocity and exaltation? You're waiting
up there near the high mountain passes,
where the ravens wheel up against the sun,
and the tight green pinecones ripen like roses.
You're waiting and then you'll fall upon
some unsuspecting traveler, leap on his back
and ride him down. Me, I'm for the flat sea,
where the water ripples luminous
with the patina of old pewter. I'm for this calm
that has no words, the day spinning slowly
off its spool, and all night long the light not gone.

20.

I'm sitting on the pier as Peter sleeps beside me.
It's water nearly all the way around,
rippling with striations of shadow and light.

The ducks are floating ahead of me, growing near
the forested island. The birds are crying their long good-nights.
Like being inside a pearl: the perfect roundness of the summer evening.

Water—slate blue, gray-blue, with midges dancing on it.
Now the ducks are sailing away from me.
The sun still white, but sinking toward the horizon.

Now the sun is a fish, caught in the Baltic seagrasses.
Peter sleeps peacefully, his whole face soft. Sometimes
I can't help touching him even though I know it will wake him.

21.

A single bird perches on a branch—a wren, a willow branch.

When the doors of the dream cabinet open, the bird flies away...
into our lives.

And the branch remains, to carry its singing.

Note:

“loged” in part 4 is deliberate, combining “lodged” and “logey.”