Necessary Light

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Published by Utah State University Press

Fargnoli, Patricia.
Necessary Light.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/9335.

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LANDSCAPE IN BLUE AND BRONZE

If she had lived, my mother would have told me
how my father wanted to hold her back from dying,
how he would if he could have, his arms
surrounding her all through her illness,
his hands, familiar as her own,
tracing the lines of her hips, the cord of spine—
wings brushing her inner thighs,
slow and insistent, committing her to memory.

She would have told how newborn
I burst from such touch, the way a conch shell
delivers itself from wave to sand, a life unspiraling.

Once in Guadeloupe I walked in the night
with a man from Majorca. He led me
out onto a dock that stretched into the Caribbean.

He didn’t speak my language.
In silence we knelt
in the blue universe to watch fish shoaling,
their silver turned to bronze by the undersea pier lights.

Later in a white stucco room filled with gypsy music,
his hands were wings, his arms filled with light.
He showed me in most eloquent language
how love can be beautiful and brief—a fishtail
flashing away into darkness.

If my mother could return she would understand.
She would tell me all love is brief,
how memory can hold for a lifetime, how death
is like the sea where the fire-coral drops off
to bottomless canyon and bronze light deepens
to thickest blue and what waits there
is huge and tentacled—a reaching shadow.
She would tell me that nothing in the end
could have held her back
from swimming hard and fast away
toward the deepest water, its blue embrace.