

KATE DELANY

## A Snapshot of the Fureys

They make a severe photograph, those first ones over,  
old family ghosts burnt into paper, in a slurry

of consternation and gelatin silver. Lockstep, they scowl  
down the photographer and eternity, a string of sepia

rowhomes hanging behind their heads like a dirty  
paper snowflake chain. He hooks his arm around her waist

as if fastening oarlocks. She's tightening her jaw. Lean  
and drawn, they look dressed for church but who knows?

No date or location marked on the back by a careful hand.  
Mothballed in their frame, they stand off-kilter, though

ramrod straight, leaning in towards the picture taker,  
and perhaps towards us, the generation that will have to

invent them from just this one image and the intimacy  
of a census report. Among the stingy breadcrumbs left

by those they raised: "they only said they didn't come  
steerage. And they were never going back."

## The Haenyos' Plunge

*The Haenyos are a group of women divers who scavenge for shellfish in the waters of South Korea's Jeju Island. Once integral to a more traditional way of life, few women are now entering this historic line of work. Among those currently part of their dwindling ranks, many are in their 60s, 70s or beyond.*

Here is the miracle,  
sunk twenty meters deep,  
beneath the blanket of the sea,  
kept from all eyes but ours—  
spry, solid grandmothers, faster than fish.  
We inherited an ancient trade, old  
as lost tongues, almost  
as incomprehensible.

Dressed in sleek suits, armed  
with only goggles and a gutting knife,  
we net abalone and conch, dodge  
jelly fish and sharks for dry  
island folks whose thoughts we barely  
rinse through or if we do, we trouble  
them. Such tough, unlovely mermaids,  
a strange sisterhood of almost gilled  
crones. Our own daughters look away.

It is a strange game of pursuit  
down here--a desperate struggle  
to complete a circle with a ragged link,  
plunging daily off these rocky shores.  
We are a dying breed, as endangered  
as anything that tries to simply live,

that counts as success what it can  
haul up in its hands.

We wrinkle the satin of the water's  
surface as our heads break the waves.  
The cliffs resound with our pants  
as we bob for breath then return  
to the water again, a continuous  
salty baptism.

We are quaking lungs. We are  
burning thoraxes, worn as pumice,  
weathered as sea glass. Yet tomorrow  
we'll mount the sea stairs, share  
the little raft, till each alone, we return  
to the sea who has marked us  
as her own.