KRISTINE CHALIFOUX

PRAYER FOR MY DAUGHTER

The world you inherit is not of my making, although I can see myself in its creation
the way prep cooks who chop
onions and zucchini into perfect spears slight and luminous as crescent moons
must feel when the succulent
final dish is set before them.
Tonight as we cooked our supper in a kitchen warmed by baking
I watched as you learned to love
artichokes, to pare tough outer leaves, to add shimmering oil to a water font,
to scrape the fleshy meat off the leaf's root until we uncovered the heart together
and dipped it, sweet and unhurried into its baptism of butter.
You held the bowl heaped with spent leaves so tightly as if not wanting to let them go
the way you worry after parting friends, each good-bye tear filled and dramatic like the time you and Manos parted - us in the boat, he on the dock of the island.
You held your arms out to him the whole way home across the lake while his voice, given wings by the mirrored stillness of the water trailed a melancholy song after - as if you both already knew that some partings are final, although I have not yet taught you that.
You entered the world alone, will venture into it again alone.
You practice for that solitary entrance now as you sleep.
The gentle ebb of breath takes you out on the open water of dreams, rises like hope as I bend to kiss you. I am taken suddenly - with how much I want for you.
The moon trails a silvery peel across the floor, a river toward the future
away from me. Your life,
caught in its gentle current,
will find a way even as the artichoke we shared
tonight grew from the heart out.
What's left in the moon's wake
as I turn to close the door
is the intoxicating perfume of childhood:
the chocolately smell of princesses
the scent of warm baked bread
my offering to sustain you, love.