

Vase

Her skin is imprinted with the leaves
the blossoms offer to the grave, as frail
as a Venus shell, as sensate
as your sweet fingers. Once in the afternoon
she took your right hand,
and you cried as if living
sea air had moved across your body suddenly,
and you entered your own city,
a place of blue
and green.
She held your hand like a wonderful
bowl, making the stunned water lick each
side in turn,
holding the world in a lacquered, Greek-painted
urn, each crystal
absolutely distinct and uninjured,
the feathery silk pod
of a milkweed, a male child's
rapt surprise to see an angel kneel with such clear
features that the gold edges of her fingers
circle round a painful, lovely hoop
of smoking air.

Now you are hot,
cold, the world's precious
quartz-edged stone,
the voice's variegated scales
of meaning, the exquisite markings
of a copper needle, the ocean surging
underneath the gate, a bridge
of perfect giving.

She remembered how she was punished in a dream,
bearing a Chinese bowl of salty
dark liquid, in which she drowned
her sins. That's how she learned
to hold you, never losing
a single priceless drop,
like a vessel made
to stretch its curving skin to hold
all the ones it's born to chasten.
Helplessly, overwhelmed and slowly,
it cannot feel itself.

— *Carol Cavallaro*