

Ars Poetica for West Tennessee

— *CJ Scruton*

A poem is a trap I lay for myself,
a hunting ground I should know by heart.

But a rabbit with a knife

is still a rabbit, a snare of irises weeping
just as strong-jawed.

Maybe I have always been a visitor.

A missing child is only a tragedy
when they know what name to call.

A girl gone nameless

is just a promise, an empty invitation,
a bed of a stranger,

a mouthful of light spilling over.

I used to go out to the pasture at night
and shine a flashlight into the smothering sky

once someone told me it'd never stop

in a million years, no matter how unsure
the message, how alien the world.

CJ Scruton

Trans Tarot Reading

*The _____ card
does not mean*

*what you think
it means.*

*_____ should be
static,*

*strong, but
the cards are asking*

*you to _____,
to see yourself*

*_____ home,
the only thing*

*between _____
and you. You,*

*a wound,
a scraping of skin,*

*a shedding,
a given*

you were so sure of

until now.

You are no omen
of anything,

no mystery
to be read, no eyes

in need of
searching.

You are not
the meditation

on the universe,
the treasured

answer untold
to the voyager

in the night woods.
There is

nothing beneath
your wing

that is not shown
on the map,

no call
that need

be answered.



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I PRETEND MY DREAMS WERE ABOUT YOU AGAIN

Always water, lately, always your face
drawn with the clarity of angels,

a bat wing gleaming under the bridge
unmasking a stomach

asking for touch, if not quite lust.
I have never known how to be

happy without a body
of water, without someone I love in wait

outside the mouth of the cave,
the thought of if it's safe

if we too wish to step into the waves
of heaven. There is no question, here,

there is no brittle earth waiting for fire
in the kiln. There is only

might, there is only
unformed vessel,

the strong hand that's needed
to shape a curve so delicate

it looks like no one even tried,
like it was the most natural thing in the world.