

One little roome, an every where

Between 1100 and 1539, 780 anchorites in England, mostly women, were enclosed in tiny structures attached to the side of a church. A shuttered window allowed the passage of food and necessities.

The damp walls are closer than the stretch of her arm.
There's a stench of sea, and she floats alongside miracles
of lobsters, crabs, creyvis, who swim and crawl

in the ignorance of praise, not yet upright
on the dry land of arrogance and doubt.
Her cell clings like a barnacle to the church,

where men in albs and chasubles shout of hell,
while she does the real work, heeds the small
voice of God in the darkness.

This is the space behind the boulder which will be rolled
away, the thick blackness in which trees take root,
where all that is to come seeds and quickens.

Love is not the right word. Love is too cushiony
for a woman who sleeps on stone, kneels on stone,
prays with the steadfastness of granite.

It's like staying awake inside sleep, this
being allowed inside the mind of God,
a great cave of nothingness that knows everything,

just she and He together, as intense as if summer
has been preserved in honey and she can hold it
on her tongue whenever she needs some sweetness.

If she grows curious about what it is to be married,
she only has to touch herself, and a sea anemone
unfurls, opens until she knows she is nothing but water.
But where a wife would cup her husband's face
between her hands, feel his bearded jaw hard
against her palm, she has no need to hold the face of God.

His eyes are on her constantly, washed with milk
and fitly set. His head is filled with dew. And there is
no word for the tenderness between them

as they drop anchor for those crowded ships of fools
who have forgotten why their souls embarked
on this brief crossing of a life at all.

Rosie Jackson