

KATHLEEN STRAFFORD

**Girl in the Woods**

tips a breath of laudanum  
from an opal vial  
shadows hide from themselves  
everything is sea pink translucent  
she lies on blankets of lady's cushion  
thinks the sky is a looking glass  
simply sees who she is  
which is no simple thing  
    living in constellations  
    & in habits of starlings  
    in secrets she holds as her dad  
    disappears up the last ray of light  
She hears the voice of water  
yelling down a glassy stream  
dark eyes reflect  
as her mother floats in a paper boat  
    leaving lilies in her wake  
she chases after where her uncle waits  
    under cherry blossoms  
    his dead men's fingers  
    finding ways to places  
    long purples shouldn't go  
she becomes a field of sunflowers  
escaping with only her yellow hat on  
her boyfriend  
ready to beat up any winking boy  
or trip them on the dance floor  
is pounding at the door  
covered in blood-red roses  
ready for a pity fuck  
she breaks the spell of black-eyed jacks  
draping walls of wisteria  
cutting off frayed edges  
refusing to be sewn up in a pillow case  
or dried flat in a book  
rolling her eyes takes another drop of tincture  
she is an ectopic single-cell multiplying  
    in avenues of goodbyes

but keeps falling into the arms of moon flowers  
whispering secrets  
to lover after lover after lover

Girl in the Woods won first prize in the Sentinel Literary Quarterly Poetry Competition (July 2020)  
judged by Terry Jones

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