

Child Naming Flowers (Robert Hass)

When old crones wandered in the woods  
I was the hero on the hill  
in clear sunlight.

Death's hounds feared me.

Smell of wild fennel,  
high loft of sweet fruit high in the branches  
of the flower plum

Then I am cast down  
into the terror of childhood,  
into the mirror and the greasy knives  
the dark  
woodpile under the fig trees  
in the ark.

It is only  
the malice of voices, the old horror  
that is nothing, parents  
quarreling, somebody  
drunk.

I don't know how we survive it.  
On this sunny morning  
in my life as an adult, I am looking  
at one clear pure peach  
in a painting by Georgia O'Keeffe.  
It is all the fullness that there is

in light. A towhee scratches in the leaves  
outside my open door.  
He always does.

A moment ago I felt so sick  
and so cold  
I could hardly move.

The Mystery of the Caves (Michael Waters)

I don't remember the name of the story,  
but the hero, a boy, was lost,  
wandering a labyrinth of caverns  
filling stratum by stratum with water.

I was wondering what might happen:  
would he float upward toward light?  
Or would he somersault forever  
in an underground black river?

I couldn't stop reading the book  
because I had to know the answer,  
because my mother was leaving again—  
the lid of the trunk thrown open,

blouses torn from their hangers,  
the crazy shouting among rooms.  
The boy found it impossible to see  
which passage led to safety.

One yellow finger of flame  
wavered on his last match.  
There was a blur of perfume—  
mother breaking miniature bottles,

then my father gripping her,  
but too tightly, by both arms.  
The boy wasn't able to breathe.  
I think he wanted me to help,

but I was small, and it was late.  
And my mother was sobbing now,  
no longer cursing her life,  
repeating my father's name

among bright islands of skirts  
circling the rim of the bed.  
I can't recall the whole story,  
what happened at the end...

Sometimes I worry that the boy  
is still searching below the earth  
for a thin pencil of light,  
that I can almost hear him

through great volumes of water,  
through centuries of stone,  
crying my name among blind fish,  
wanting so much to come home.