

*Nicolette Bethel*

## THE SCOTSMAN GIVES LILY HER NAME (1904)

• • •

He lay without regret beside  
a girl whose child was calmed to sleep  
by breasts of well-rubbed teak, and wet with milk.  
When Annie filled her daughter's mouth  
on liquid nights, he suckled too,  
and chased the shades of boats across the sea.  
*His* child surprised him, springing wild  
and undesired in her. Alive despite his fear,  
she swam insistent for the light.

Malcolm smiled; she looked like him,  
skin pale as teeth, hair still as water  
hauled cool from limestone wells.  
Her lips were pink against the breast  
his lips had pulled; her hands  
curled bright against the dark.  
He dreamed of sails trimmed tight,  
and fed his face to slapping air.

He named her Lily, for her whiteness,  
but her eyes held secrets, dark as lakes  
that swallowed sons beneath their waves.  
He gathered winds about him. He wrapped  
her fingers round a ring, and left.  
Annie held her girls and wept.