

S A L O M E

by John Alspaugh

Crouching barefoot, she would spy down
From the boulders overlooking the morning
River. The water shining around
His lithe waist. His undulant arms
And reflection outstretched

To those cautious, to those
Wading deeper to reach him.

She dared not be seen so knelt there
As if petitioning the new kingdom, the strong clouds
So she might die in the Baptist's arms
And become the smooth currents
Against him.

She would be silk
And feel the breeze loosen her fabric.
She would be the water that danced around him.

Taking others by the wrists

He would lift his bearded face
Toward hers, or else toward the sky,
And with his eyes gleaming bright
He'd summon the first death
By drowning whoever had come:

"Repent! For the New Life
Is wrought through my hands!"

She feared he might kill forever,
His muscles taut and dripping.
But he knew when to relax
And raise up his victims.
He'd thrust them hard over his head
And shake them until they'd spit
Water, until they'd gasp

Louder than she watching
As he shoved each victim skyward
Shaking them back and forth:
Back before childhood; forward
Beyond old age,

So they might see
It all in a second
Life within them.

She'd run back to the palace
Afraid, but always return to watch
The next day.

Time passed, and there was talk of another
Savior. But she was loyal
And her days were spent
In hiding, dwelling in the great
Boulders over the river.

One sundown when he was alone
She sensed forever, watching him
Wade out through the smooth sheet
Of water, all the way up to his chest.

She sensed the recurrence: The pale river
Sliding toward evening. Her young body
Shivered when he plunged all the way

Under. Again, she sensed forever when
Only his shaggy head bobbed up, gliding
On the surface of the river, dripping
On its silver platter.