

THE FRESCO WORKER APPEARS SUDDENLY IN THE PICTURE

When he rubs his hands for blood flow it snows.
If I were a leper, if I were a snake... Shavings skim

the fresco's surface as strips separate, peel, palm
creases deepened. ...*would I cease to hold these hands*

together, would I slough, erase my face... Slick slate
bodies of fish spread wing-fins, swim and leap

across the wall to form an ellipse : they mirror
the fresco worker's face as his thumb goads metal,

scales polished in circles. *Skin becomes scale.* Lime
and granite kneaded to the consistency of dough

transform him. *I am a leper – no, a snake that sloughs*
itself to reveal that supple layer. If he were a leper,

like a leper, would the swirls and lines deepen,
separate, cease to hold carpals to wrist to radius?

If he were the snake, like a snake, at least the lines
would stretch, hold, redden into pink scars. Either

way he sheds skin, rubs olive oil over fingertips,
the metal tool, the wall; his eyes grow as distant

as the eyes of the fish. He breathes, skin passes
over gills, leaves yellow wings slippery, reflection

born as he swims, slick-skinned, *I am land-landscape,*
shadow on marble, shadow on grit, *I am fish.*

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