

Asphodel

Asphodelus fistulosus

It's true, you did warn me I might regret
taking home to plant in my garden any of those
onionlike clumps I was helping you
dig out of your lawn, but I'd be glad,
I said, to have them there to remind me of you,
their tall stems and tiny white flowers,
so I saved a few clumps from your compost pile.

Asphodel, known since ancient Greece
as a flower of mourning, their evergreen leaves
blanketing the Asphodelian Meadows
where Hermes, Messenger of the Gods,
Patron of thieves, merchants and wordsmiths
with winged sandals and snake-entwined staff
leads and leaves the souls of common mortals,
last stop after the River Lethe
where he had them drink away their lives.

Asphodel, sometimes called Onionweed,
blossoming each spring and again after summer rains,
an invasive species that crowds out native plants,
endangers natural communities,
listed as a noxious weed by several states
here in the arid Southwest, where again
this afternoon (ages since then),
on my knees with a spading fork I spent hours
digging up hundreds of evergreen clumps
inside and outside the garden fence hoping
this time to get them all before they blossom.