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The Ventriloquist's Backbone

by Audrey Freudenberg

B. A. Yale University, 1992

presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of **Master of Fine Arts**

at **The University of Montana**

May 30, 2000

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*I was afraid if I went downhill of returning to the Sea
where I had sworn never to return.*

Samuel Beckett, "The Calmative"

The Rules

Let us be very jealous
Very conservative
Very suspicious
Very cruel.

We will wear the faith:
The second hands
Of champions.
We will wear it out.

To Arabian Knights
We will teach back zero
If they're lucky. We will
Be lucky.

Let us spend this fortune
Watching our own tears fall; we are
Bent double here,
Set, as we are.

We will suddenly receive
What departs from us.
Let us. The friction
Will be terrible.

We will be reminded.
Yes, the same faces.
Let us let ourselves puncture reason,
See its camera.

Touch should not
Disrupt your view.
We don't know function yet; don't jump.
We are looking.

TIME ZONES

Friends

HE OPENED his smile like a coat,
said "revelers! travelers!"
and our walk to the tennis courts
was brightened by his wisdom,
"what is't o'clock."
We said, "My friend, how right you are."

HE WELCOMED our awe, he held our hands,
said "friends! You have a home here!"
admiring our adopted land.
He fished in the knapsack of our mutual discovery,
said, "for me, it's only two. I am from Ireland."
I said, "My friend, how right you are!"

FOR INDEED, it did relieve to meet with such.

One O'clock

I was wrong about that time.
We were going to the tennis courts,
and a man asked us if we could tell him
what time it was. One, we said.
Now, he said. Well that would make it
three for me. We smiled, and threw
our arms to wrap him up, cried "home,"
and he said Ireland. What, we said.
My friend you are wrong,
and from Wisconsin.

The improvisatory gestures required of a colonist

defining colonist along the lines of
those who settle
or settle for
someone else elsewhere
which makes
those persons in question
otherwise
someone stalling with no paper

Sustenance

I question the sneeze,
the abandoned ship, the scurried
down my bones.

I put out my plate for my portion. Ribcage hums
its quiet rebellion, corrupting more fields, more wonders,
more grapes than capitulation heals.
Capitulation only makes wine: forgotten casks.
Unsatisfied shadows tickle

Selah

Find the church, the school: walls struck by faith,
the frumpy furrows of Jethro Tull's imagining. The one lump
shall have of the other but little, and fight for its own wave
back. The flat of the far, the harvesting eye,
serves as the haze, the seeding form.
A scratch, a letting go

Selah

That bear, foraging for berries, found me.
At last, I did not apologize. Its eyes
were hidden from me by its teeth, working tilt
like a hairy jukebox rambling through the 50's
quickly. With some vengeance. A pause the size of

Selah

Selah

High in the rafters, the forklift fails.
In the dusky middle distance
the operator smokes.
Terminal wraiths flee fire, rise,
frame and defend what is delicate.
Belief in storage sags a bit
under the extant company's
too crinolated weight.
Though absent when called, they
anticipate a rectifying impact.
A shelf of silk does droop,
so slightly, on its plastic stems.

A rose from any distance
smells like think. Sanctify it.

I
will

crumble as a brick
where I choose to feel it;
triumph at the edges,
thinking, *close* :

sustenance has no rose.

THE ATTRACTION OF DIMINISHING RETURNS

1. Sisyphus, a mortal man

suspected he had a broken bone.
Sisyphus, suspicious that his heart,
The act he could not accomplish --
Sisyphus suspected
best not say
the way to his heart had a bend in it now
he'd look through to life
with refracted eyes, cracked
by the heavy blessings of the last two minutes
and a belief
that survival is straight.
A man becomes a fly
when his eye
a mosaic of tiles,
(cracked pepper, black fraction of a grip, corn-
ea divided by a single need for sustenance,
traction on soft white, get a gaze, graze this)
adopts the search for a one,
loses perspective and all the fifteenth century since then.
His story repeats itself.
In shock, he circles the block.
Goodbye. An eye for candlelight.
Looking for the disappearing point.
Finding only one thing, he pushed it.

2. Merope, immortally a sister

A woman in love.
"He's immortal, now.
He's made a name."
The woman with tears but no pity,
who only knows suffering from winter air
and seeks ways.
She finds comfort in colors

and takes a northern blue despair
not to cheer it, but to breathe out its steam
on the window, where she may draw
what she knows; consider the glass
pane –
its threat of breaking under the weight of variables
(parables)
before the formula saturates again.
Humid air occludes unchosen Whens.
She never puts pictures away. These are clues,
but all are disconnected by their season of disuse.

3. Cry.

I will say this,
you will what? his voice a mousetrap
Don't distract me, I have a point to make
say. Ess A. It's a try.

Merope waited for days.
His eyes were on the rock, only.
She thought have I come all this way to be ignored? Yes, okay.
He got to the top of the mountain and brushed his hands
on the pockets of his jeans.
Hi, Merope, so casual; head already aiming for the bottom of the slope,
anticipating rockslides.

4. I know.

Borrowed time
Slime
From something, a memory of algae
and Merope, and the tide.
Eyes wide.

This climb.
Tactile hypothermia, can't feel or find.

This is the longest day.
Beer? The end? Brew. Brand.
A word needs no stomach to land in.

5. Calendar:

Jupiter plucks at Pluto through his blankets,
on his couch. Gods dream of having edges. Dream of skin.
Made at the mercy of whim and vision, they grope for dark
while night lasts, study absence, an eternal room.
Change the decor. Colors race by in durable lobby weave.

But I
have a memory of eyes that promised company.
I have made him fear his hands.

Left me for a rock,
but rescued me from
seasides under glass.
Now, I look at the back of a man
and know his plans for eternity.

I'm pale, for a goddess,
nobody likes me up here.
I haven't the complexion for pining.
Can't listen to the wind.
I think I smell the sweat of Sisyphus.
He is in my nostrils and won't leave.
I hide in the kitchen and wash dishes.

For three hours every day, I walk
in an illusory Away.

Your efforts
move me.
I can see your back,

in all of this.

Your body keeps a record of repetition.
I look at you and see yesterday.

I throw myself at you, a stone.
You didn't imagine it.

Talking to Renata

Spinning on its edge before it rolls
and comes to rest, a cap defies its likely
hood, toppling. What is left of medicine?
Sufficient preparation for salt water.
A pogie is a hat with wings: sun block
becomes redundant. Whispered words to Carl
about our gear. My sandals, toes, and fear
are always in the way amongst these rocks.
Tea, heads bent through bumpy views,
attempts to carry inadequate: twos
become fours, and this before the tents
are loaded in. The kayaks lean their fiberglass
antipathy towards the Doubtful Sound,
the Captain Cook who named these bloody swarms
of quick black flies denies retreat
to both of us: his history is now
my camera's souvenir-to-be. I list
the things I know against the ways
I don't know how, and stay. The dolphin play
denied us by the language of instruction
exceeds the strokes Renata knows,
and she says "on the water?" The leader holds
the paddle in his hand, and plan; his eyes
will give her neither. "That is where," he says
"we get the wind and waves." "You understand"
he later turns to shout in her direction,
"it's inside out?" Renata doesn't put
her paddle jacket on the deck, so when
the waves pursue and pass us with the speed
of our own shock, "Stay close to the rocks"
I know he said shore, but that's what they are,
these fjordland whores to the ocean's lips;
I find, while I'm hunting for rudder's grip,
that I see the one spot of brown in the blue
of Renata's left eye. Or was it the right?
On this whitecap, my right to face strangers
wavers.

THE LIFE OF OBJECTION

A friend says to Pygmalion:

So you've made it.
Where is she?
I warned you a woman, did I,
interfere with your work.

The impossible beauty of other people,
popsicles' cold on my teeth,
the Neurosis of Never After.
Faces around corners that seem to be pulled from mine
in a high speed chase involving plaster.
Mice with no mothers,
a bed with no covers;
the one I love is far away
and I can't ask you out to play
because I am within the thrall
of every hour that I have spent alone.

Hermit. The hunching over. The privacy of lovers. I was reaching before,
but now I am teaching. Small children. I have to wear loose-fitting clothes.
I had no idea that it had been three years. That picture was taken.
I want to write letters to all
the people I avoided and tell them why
I like to be alone. But you go there
and I have to explain
why I, instead of doing what you do, have done what I have:
in the long rows of the rays of light in hallways grown long
for estrangement, I saw people layered
under dirty, spinning water.
Insistence would grow bright and options dim.
We had to pretend we weren't drowning
in order to walk unhindered down
the streets you floated over,
was that my pager? Never mind.
It's asking me – I'm asking for
the indelible passion of wishes.
You'll say it was her merit,
a quality you can't describe, but gave;
you attributed by accidental
intimacy, a scarf in the cold
around her stone neck. You might discover
the rest of her body, if it can prove you right:
its physical presence affirming the graces

you thought yourself in power to bestow.
I want answers. To see this stone, but --

Where are my keys? I should leave.

Pygmalion's Acceptance Speech

Invention: we approach it
with chiselling looks. The power
we must hold in check
amazes me.

When I go to the bank, I can hear the buzz
of quantity over the hum of ceiling fans.
What is worth, without it? The clay,
perfect shapes sure
and sure, through and through certainty;
granules to measure spite,
it can hold the wine and texture; but you'll admit,
the dare-I-say-here-I-go *soul*?
It shies from dirt as a vampire from light:
Absolute Quick. That motion,
the only flight.

The most difficult task,
the heaviest withholding,
can take its impression,
invite the freeze.

The Day In Between

Galatea reaches for the marble lip,
the groove of a master's hand, doesn't know
her goal is to touch it, her hip.

One cannot touch without two,
and this is the day of presumption.
One takes life.

There is no separation here:
milk is unforgiving,
white, another's medium.
I get mad and go for a sandwich.
I don't say why. I say, "I have to get

back to work soon. Grab a bite.

By the bye:
even Innocence
was a Pope three times.”

I don't say, I.

In the Glass

I went across the room to put the light out:
last living glow of the dinner party,
the candle I saw from bed.
Vanilla scent and flame was all the guidance that I had.

I went across the room to put the light out,
but midnight steps
made quick and gentle work of a thing
I felt a ping;
my smooth plum goblet
went on its last celebrated campaign.
Hand-blown, foot broken,
chiming on my feet, the baby bells
bounced back from the wall
and hit me.

I went across the room to put the light out.
She thanked me with an ornamental tree.
My cold nose on her forehead,
the goblet's purple glow,
taught me to approve.

I went across the room to put the light out.
The darkness arrived,
pushing back the concave shapes of effort,
braced against my eyebrows and the wide
breach of the sudden that was my eyes,
opened them to uninvited encores.
I braced my palm to feel
the chill of her footboard,
found it before mine, brass
greening under my fingers,
the carpet dull and short beneath my toes,
a basement black that seeped around the rest of me
with drifting flannel punctuation
and a rope around my waist to tie me to bedtime.
I did not speak, because that night,
I knew that she was jealous of my sleep.

I went across the room to put the light out.
It wasn't far. I did not touch the wall;
I must have stopped somewhere. I was all cold,
spaceheater hoping with me, I toestepping
throw rug, linoleum. One or two feet where I could be.

The phone call came. "Did you know?"
my mother said, and that was all she would.
Did you know that this was going to happen?

I went across the room to put the light out.
I broke the parabolic curve of your return.
I saw suspicion fly, pale as helium, from hands.
My squeezed body, inadequate knees,
witnessed departure of rescue.

I went across the room.
I want to melt it down,
the glass, the movement,
the color, the kick,
with this forge
fanned by love of justice
over embers of silence
desperate with cold.
Nobody knows the rules here,
there is no heat and no power.

There is no shape that glass could take.

Delay

In dripping dark,
porticoes of seaweed
comprise the only
architecture

slick memories
whose vernal creeping over
makes rocks' grip
elusive

passage belongs
to the inanimate;
flesh shakes at the lack
of dimension

strength is undesirable
here, peeled, static;
motion is required
to go between

breath breaks
at the mention
of impossible
and draws again

this incendiary walk
catches fire
elsewhere;
these feet

notice need wicking
away in this unlit
inertia. They
insist upon

persistence, their
existence, heels;
fright is their
cavity.

Beauty is spelled
and its parts are found
to be brittle
without each other.

There comes
the knowledge:
report of desire
to be answered

this lets an ear
hear heartbeat: this
presents the approach
of delay.

Reply is not
disowned, but
directive:
commitment,

a greasy attempt.
Covert adaptation
deregulates,
finds other methods

difficult to measure.
Compromise
has not been
a diplomat today.

Another,
more direct.
Not even prayer
can hold:

Prayer for the departure
of other elements;
a further reduction,
another round.

The interruption
continues. The body
waits for speed
to break it.

You question Argenteuil?
he said.
You question conquerors?
You question silver and the

history of beds? He said
(I say, I kick obscurity)
I said, he said, what has
been here? I answer him,

but all he hears is fear.
Been shivered, he said.
It should be summarized.
Instead of seaweed,

I kick. I find my foot
cemented deep
in his stomach. He says
this is the price of hesitation.

Overhead

Things are good at the Portland office.
People are fun.
We're currently negotiating offers.

They don't like change. Non-union,
The question. The whole Northwest has such potential.
There's been some staff rotations.

They do industrials,
Good non-union labor? There?
Trade shows. They're like commercials.

They probably have outside contracts harbored,
Carpenters, you've *no* idea,
There's more efficient labor.

Hate to say the "C" word. Canada.
I don't think the rules – philosophy,
For-profit – can apply accross the border!

Have they got lower salaries?
That's what we heard. Here's how
They'd make good – funny –

Portland's contribution is now
Only twenty-five percent.
Here's how.

A RACE FOR THE FEINT OF HEART, SLIGHT OF HAND

Epitaph from Outside

For the Fifty-Four Remaining Reindeer and Cheryl Glass:
the endangered arctic species whose horns grow too heavy for them to carry
and the Seattle woman with a genius IQ and brown skin who chose to spend her life
racing cars, and won. She had some construction work done on her house, and one day
she ended up
off the Aurora Bridge.

FlagSpeak

Is the finish packaged for delivery?
The checkered past?
Who told them they could start?

What will they do with
the orange danger, if they took that
for green?

Bets from the Crowd (Regarding beasts of burden)

Well. The cold, one would assume,
the gynecological splay of
offending antlers
in the sightlines of reindeer
with jawbones etching ice
in failed attempts to lift
the evidence of their --
years. Borne down by souvenirs?

Internal Combustion (Engine)

You never threw stones but had the eyes to see them on the ground
and wondered about the walking;
the on or over step, arc of forward inclination
turning you round, returning to you.
You to whom the stones appeared in a still avalanche,
arriving when your foot met their ground
for a running talky.

Raise your hand and flag them down.

You for whom travel had been light
because what came, you dealt with quickly: wrap, strap.
Possession was a net, a swift transposition in your skull from heavy
to fuel for flight.

Raise your hand and burn the weight of action.

Something not clever stood in the way of your fire.

Lady of the racetrack, deliverers of fairy tales,

Raise your head and run to bed

I do not blame the demise of your leadership
on those who had a passion for what you gave; (you could)
crash the elements of danger and dubious self-interest,
throw them off your trail, through your ashes, down your chimney.
They land in your place.

The survivors have limbs coming out their arms,
they blow hard and wave them. You have their
heavy breath

Raise quest from dearth to circular argument, ask

Instead I say: this is a thread of red yarn.
We'll raggedy ann a wig for you, dear;
but oh don't look: you don't know, the dangers of reflection.
If I twist and pull it, it begins to have
a flat, according to index and under the thumb.

Raise the flag they did not stop for. Waive it.
Again?

Held at the edges,
the center holds least. Flat or thin,
the round does not return.
Her jacket gives her away. *With odd,* said incredulous the crowd.
External, taut over the inside.
The skull could house a channel,
door to door, room to room, neighbors
could be, if only they'd stop repeating
themselves, union, jack. Derision
erects a shadow room, more walls.

Attenuated organs preach the choir.

With a snap at the base, our knowledge of extremity is lost.
The remaining population applauds with inflatable arms.

Ms. Glass, Spoken (Silence from the car)

*I am looking for exchange.
Much comes in.
Doesn't my roll bar surround me?
Octane is not proof. What is this smoke?
The way
I do things?*

*Where is the crack in the block
that will allow me to name this engine?*

*The sky is blue. I see white.
Can I go by*

Protection

Speech Left Running

She leaves her *formula*, takes her *for*.

She leaves:
with conflated prepositions,
she is undivided.
Un, divided.

Shame's Location

I. (I could only find it in the body)

A person of indeterminate sex, you
stand at a fountain in the center square of a town
you don't know, it is yours.
You acquire a dim recollection
of the names of the two of the five
streets leaving the square.
You say these names to yourself.
Someone looks at you from perhaps
twenty feet away, perhaps twenty yards -- but then,
you've never been good with estimates, perhaps
the person, a woman, wasn't looking at you at all.
Perhaps it was a man. You sit on your hands
to excuse for not waving at anyone
who passes, in case anyone
whom you should know should pass.
You are responsible for knowing. You don't.
People pass. None of them look at you.
Whether they are thinking about you,
and wondering about your hands, whether they
are getting cold on the concrete below them,
below you, they are, it is winter, you don't know.
The puncturing chill of the texture
gives you a sense people passing they
whether have somewhere to go, you don't know.
You may have been pressed only now,
are scheduled to go there with them.
Your hands waffle, marked with the evidence.
Your reluctance. Whether your hands are
the source of this reluctance you don't know.
They bear the mark. Whether it's red
or pink, you don't know. You haven't looked yet.
You look in one direction only, to avoid the eyes
of people you may not know.
Running over the names, the streets, you do.
Reject the stones, grope for names in periphery.
Far right, with a pigeon
is a café. You don't know what they serve.
Your voice might be ordering eggs.
Someone says easy. It could be the waitress.
You are afraid to meet her.
The chair at the edge grows more compelling.
Its weathered yellow may be fir;
it has a grain, is a light, weak wood.
Who might the someone be who takes the chair?
There is no one in the chair, it is
a folding chair. Your hand relieved of pressure,
but you are standing, so you walk
toward the chair with attention to as, likely,
and way, your appendages.
There is a table now,
with a large cloth napkin,
brighter than the dusty, yawning white
of flinging awning sun back from the patio's
tilting crush of earth.
Look directly at it.
Notice that you are not interested.

II. (a certain no)

An ache in one of your shoulders.
The shadow touches yours.
The sun is behind you. Happy circumstance
that may be inappropriate. It does not seem
a mistake one could have easily made.
It is your chair now, it would seem
it has your movement. You'd have to
declare it, stand up so to speak
for it, one would think you'd imposed yourself
so you don't have to sit on your hands.
There is a faint, sandy impression,
now visible, a skin disease,
you don't know any names, your left hand
hesitates, your right hand reaches for
the spoon, have desire to repeat,
the memory that comes to mind is seeing
someone stick a fork in someone else's film,
a hand stuck, you may have, or violent, personal past.
It is what you reach for then, to avoid;
because you want, the hand moves oddly.
You look up to see if anyone has noticed.
See apron wearing white over waitress' skirt.
See breath upon the spoon, hanging your nose
to occupy the time. You were in the seventh grade once.
There is no plate. You don't know where
the menus are. Perhaps there is no food.
Perhaps you are expected
to know your favorite drink.
Look at the table, again; again, a pigeon
passes your peripheral: viz., unusual,
its backward pass. Think of wings, the plucking
sound of commencing flight, loose feathers of the alouette: go up.
You are not hungry, yet. You may be.

Detour

The corners are pulling again. To say wanderlust
is too strong. The body coins counterweight
phrases: dirty fingernails, harvesting lettuce,
a forward inclination. This heavy room
can hove the heel of action, slide the door
between the blister and the friction past
that made it bloat and sing. No-one says
let's see the cause.

The corners are willing again.
They welcome arbitration,
sign contracts on the white space
of gum wrappers, comply with all direct requests.
They keep the law on their side.

The corners are coming again,
at the end of every stand in line.
Says the wall, there's a sign.
Stay until nine a.m. DIAL.

Sugar, song is a hipful of molasses.
Feel the dark indenture flex
to cup your low notes. Sugar me
the drifter, batwing, acrobat. So sweet.
So, sweet: I'll tell you something,
please look up. Let down.
Thrush the halo of ambition.
Your adventure and your somnolence depend upon
unclasping, peeling, forcing all your jeering to the edge.
Don't claw so at the chilly laws past friendship.
Here's the toothsome formula we use for parasites:
suffer the cosmopolitan: let all stickers stay.
The animal Construction has no boundaries.
It crosses holes. Sugar hands are on the wheel.
Expectation pours concrete, the force of habit holds,
prevents the car, the small dog jiggering up the bridge
from falling in. The lease to skip to future
allows the rush to paint their sides
the orange of near miss.

The auctioneer sells anger, going fast.
Low bids, anonymous donors.
Boiled by the book, the buyer tells the crowd,
"I did it my way."

(blue on the wall from the spine of her slam-held breath)

Shatter of shape, a leap between now and near.
Later still, more lasting than fill,
is the nicotine pull, the drag of Wonder
smoking Time. Conglomerate welcomes gambol
on the necks of diverse mirrors;
drivers throw their fuzzy dice
by turning with the signs.
Tires find their way on the jelly of recently,
soon to set but Sugar grabs her Lucky Foot

snowflack melts on Sugar's tongue:
the wistful mirage of endings
where streets still paved
run smooth. Prey to her impatience,
not yet fingering feligree,
she winds her double standard,
remidases touch. She watches her back.

On her target is superimposed
the clothing of a constellation's winter --
consider mistakes and their crystal growth
on the same, base magnet of focus.
She feels the cold to know
its passing. Arches flesh to entropy.

How many cagey bars
she will have felt before
the more she wore before
she will have pattern left
to offer her a grain
she will have left.

The wary adjourn to the corner of 1st and Zen,
looking for coin-operated phones.

**Bridal Veil Falls: or,
Why Eve Was Bothered When Adam Was Bugged by the Snake**

Water falls: tradition pinions the self within self.
The show, the shower.
Indictment of power could only be achieved
when there aren't so many plants around.
Would that be too late?

The top,
the drop,
separates.

Then:

The rate of the fall and the distance, there is time.
Eye, finger, tipping, gripping, stop.
The slant of her regard, turning still
away from his. (Nobody pushes anybody. They're holding hands. Over.)

Pause will, until the counting. Lungs are a swan deflating hush
and saying so, brushing adieu with one plucked feather on the lips
of her body and his departure. Good afternoon remains removed.
Limbs are one by one combed back to the joint to measure their worthiness,
cloth and culture so -- anyway, thin.
Pinch holds. Removal is unnecessary.
She opens her mouth to apologize (Cue Breath of Life. Over.)

Inflation brings them in again, the thread count, numbers, weave of gestures
so foreign they offend, gulping decoy

of a disappointed silence.

The tips
of
fingers
keep
time

in a manner that sings Eventual in a heavy chord.
Another solution: they don't meet.
Adam seems. In response,
her eyes seek dissolve: an outwardly contracted witness.
She swallows the dance of intransigence -- who said --

She begs: admit that contradiction.
Something here that bites. She swells in all locations
of his kiss. She hisses into the microphone -- for the record.

Just what makes company, do you think? She swipes at what grows
along the sides of him, swears multiple times, gives birth to a jury
and pits the members against the return of ache.
She is tired of the third. She wants one. And five.

In the meantime, time is mean. Relentless. She spits and swells.

ATTENTION TO THE TRAFFIC IN YOUR WORK

i. Jacob's Ladder Hits the Ground

*(wherein the ladder tells people to keep off,
pointing to the rasp of eager climbs;
but sympathy weevils the wooden voice
that warns off would-be joiners. . .)*

I am the rung, the herald of feet
where wings were presumed. The angels take steps.
They take me. My head is in the clouds,
doubtless. The brave intoxication of connection
polishes my glow, though I wouldn't know.
I'd have it so. This is not what you meant by intimacy.
You must not insist on the body. Angels
have none, and if you insist on the body,
you'll not have them. Deliverance
is a function you'll lose if your choleric
fists the pages of tradition.
There is a catalogue of feathers.
It scatters, but it does not travel.
Flight in aspiration's despot train
drags down the eyes of believers.
I am the rung, the sound of the meeting
of grief and foreign soil. The hollow where what has been denied
chimes still, the vigor of will
gone sour, the taste of release.
If you must climb, do not grasp.
That is not the style of angels, and if you wish
to give yourself away, you might do it
in the spectrum of the possible.
We have no arenas or horses here.
Vertical comes to earth, but earth comes to prayer.
Feeling is subject to its taut strength, the close
of eyes, proximity of rejection.
Angels were promiscuous, once. They
are not the ones to put your faith in.
They gamble. You'd like to have their cards,
but they only have one hand. They don't share,
which is a kind of cheating you can't prepare yourself for.
I'm telling you my wit and grain are polished by their passing, but I
have my limitations, too. You have your prayers. I pray
your sweat lands somewhere else. I never see the angels.
I catch glimpses of lovers losing sight of each other
before they give themselves to this journey, and I wish

the ecstasy of goodbye could be perpetual for you,
that greeting of defeat and the meter
of portion. The clasp that closes eyes,
the adjacency that caresses angels' constant departure.

2. The Perforated Door

(in which Privacy is Pursued beyond its closure)

Peek:
How many have you had?

More:
Just zero.

{subsequent altercation}

Pique:
Who is she?

Sore:
Abjection.

3-Story: Body, head to boot

(the bar that couldn't hold its drinks)

Slack, the Stomach apprehends a Wit
and sits to tea; its partiality
(partition from locality of ventricle)
will serve as bait. (Parts is parts.)
Bar-stool chum by way of a lantern fish.

Stomach, slack, is party to its costume,
declares the "movement" wasn't him,
admits to being in it. Orders Wit
a snake bite for a drink, glowers briefly,
burps on his own tab (this was not Wit's idea of intimacy)

unseen by Wit and tapping out
the rhythm of what mercy might have been.
A bubble pops, Wit wavers, venom's
menace is repented. Stomach sings
a cagey, tear-struck symphony.

"I wanted to ask you, I always did,
whether you meant to send such a sharp lid.
It corners any mending tendency."
"I'm sure," said Wit, "you will forgive;
one eye alone is one too many. . .

I perceived your ampleness.
My missives were dissolved.
I sent a chair to last
toward our conference."

iv. Index

She hopes to hear permission.
She tunes the fork in the road.
she strikes, watches the descent
of the match. She wants
ignition's malice
to map its burn against the air this time.

Her invitation illustrates her anger.
I climb the steps; her hyperbolic breath
has found no receptacle since my last
visit, so I inhale the char
of an indistinct pathos,
the burials at She Said.

She testifies to a washcloth,
forces a drain. I have desire
to flee, but flight will conjure
her assent: fluttering burnings,
left alive by the oxygen leaks
in her privacy.

Irrelevance is mandatory here.

I tell her my stories. I tell her my stories are sandman to some.
I tell her she sleeps with her carnivores.

She accuses me of graininess in photos.
She says she wants to travel.
She holds my eye with memory;
she hands her resignation to its crimes.

She says, How many have you had?

I say I shut my eyes to scenery,
defend myself with the current
of releasing angels.

This was not what I meant by intimacy.

Perplexed, a Romance

She wanted to be asked to leave.
He caught her by surprise,
the glue from her mask
on his fingers, her frown
an abandoned place.
She tells him she means his behavior.
Her shoulders arrive on the scene.
He beaches himself in a folding chair,
a whale. Exhale. What country
has he landed on?
The air is old, and owes him.
Give him the power to change!
Impressive and distressing,
seduction's early cry.
Taken out of context and Hawaii,
a toad can hold roadkill
in amplexus, sex for a season.
Oh that amphibious clasp
continuation has!
Traveller, the room
was made damp in our absence.
Amphibians forget
how happy they are
in the water. Fingers meet,
bumping. Fury. Crawdads
mingle with shrimp in the shag.
I hope my explanation
that carpet dries
will mean something.
I hope
the carpet dries.
I'll greet princes with plastic slippers.
Bring me that picnic in Dixie cups.
We can all be limited
by our implicit acts.
I am a toad.
A big cane toad.
They call me Dairy Queen:
I'm big, and fondled, and mean.
She blows smoke in my face.
"But how are you going to justify"
(Her air is thin, like mine.)
Put on the back
of a sinking gold,

tooth decay alone
could ride that body down.
Disappearing fins,
is this where life begins?
You swim. You swing your arms
with a hometown confidence, then.
Why haven't you been kissed? Before?
By me?
I wanted to be asked to leave.
Transformations offer the unlucky
welcome departures. A friend's boyfriend
at my birthday party
stole a boat for me, and I
have had to deny
my innate understanding
of sailing since. A second time
I stole away.
To look at the stars, to avoid
the clutter of comprehension.
A lecture on Kafka brought him down,
kissing like an athlete all the way,
addicted to hindered degrees.
How expressly the landing foot
claims what was elsewhere!

That one counted.
I'll find a country for you.

Push[ing] the Background

First, an elemental depiction of will. I give you:
a block of it. Red with an underlined dark.
Determination sweats.

Then I meet you with the best
of intentions and other
epistolary trappings: a wax seal.

The kiss that happened in the middle of the road, with the train
and its threat in the back of your mind, the train
at the back of me: that was an opening.

The impression: I was in
no position to notice it.

The impression was made
on the smooth side of loneliness.

{You} tell me now
I have sleep in my eye.
I fill the rest in,
keep its interference
to represent something
I could not see then.

[I] apologize for the dust,
the reminder. The dust itself
keeps me awake.
I venture into its shadows, and its own
apologia swelters tropical. I despair of duet
amidst a symphony of chewing ants.
Fragments melt toward vision:
your kiss is a piece of wax waking.

Impressionable again.

I wake to find {a man} calling me baby. I
sift through the baroque trash.
Marvel at how high my own hand holds it.
The curved limbs of the eighteenth century
are not really sorry. They are drenched
with premature offers of forgiveness.
I blink. The black sea remains.
The cold recedes.

I touch it with my teeth.
It is hard enough
to give me its eye.
I pay it compliments.
I say, your obsidian blight
is, in isolation, evidence
of something.
It says, there is
no evidence. I say
I see you. It says
you call those teeth?
I spit pith from my mouth.

You wake me.
Stop me in bed.
I say, it is the product
of a great desire.

In the corner of my eye,
I see the ragged side of loneliness.
Success is held roughly.
Excellence waits to be finished.

At night, sadness swells its inveterate walls.
The sadness rides horseback, the rolled eyes
fold whipped white to shadow.
The sea declares victory, constantly.

Attempting to Bury the Sea

Yesterday is not recent enough.
I had gone up the hill.
She said she couldn't get back down.
I used to go that way,
she said again, and then she drowned.

Swish, the tail of the dairyman's dray.

Yesterday, in the ruined freedom
I cannot tell. I might have, right across it.
Put my tongue in fortune's ear.
Counted all the times I said receive.
Belief is passing.

Swish, the thieves have stolen into idleness.

All might change. The strange
farewells. I had gone up the hill,
was it Torquay? to hear the bray
of the ass and also the antelope
leaping to their signal sacrifice.

Swish, it's bound to happen, lest the list.

I am resolved, I say this evening.
Are there two? I only know
my childhood, and even that
is far enough from hunger.
Still the bloom.

Swish, the whisper's hush has come to this.

Abbreviated, unencumbered,
two blinking lips commemorate
their great escape.
The opening is tin
and crossed with ginger.

Swish, the lap of water is the surface of ability.

The gorge is risen, rocky edge,
long live the gorge
to wish another joust upon
the cork, the balking breakers

taking sun from inward slopes.

Swish, the loss of never under umber.

Back to the wall, hold
gillyflower; treasure clove, await
the dance. An oceanic open
shifts between the stands of kelp.
The skin is a salty reserve.

Swish, the whelps of seals are handy company.

She is hardly breathing anymore,
and hard is hearing. Pain
articulates the hand
that holds the flower
in her apopleptic bower.

Swish, the fish within her blood have asked her, now, to dance.

The authority here
is that minutes will pass in poverty,
wade in treasure
giftless and unfound.
The sound.

Carry on.

All hands.

Subpoena

White from the image of nowhere, collecting
finish. I wonder, weed,
wheresoever the spring has gone.

The fumble was made, but not necessarily
final. Gaze, amazed, from a lifted head,
but where the hands?

The letterhead, expensive and under the seige
of wandering fistfuls of lustful tines, the end
of the inheritance. The rest is all

conciliant caress, signatory transfer
of bale from full to bile. Will not be looked at.
It's only dirt, not color, say unwritten marginalia.

The feasible monkey is under the slow blush of thunder.

I promised him a certainty that was not mine to give.
Myself, I have water.
No real estate.

I go to the door, the neighbor is not home, I knock.
I know he is not home. And so he will not answer.
I knock, because the feasible monkey crouches at my back.

Wisteria struggles against its own strangle,
juggling my gaucherie in blossoms on the wind:
learning even now the butter lessons

of thrice-hated laundromat matadors,
flicking their flap
of towel and arm
to land it
under mine.

I knock, cognisant of no-one. His hiss
emanates from shadow of sun-dial.

I said it was expensive? Cotton. Absorbent. Inked.

He is still not home. I cannot be clear enough.

We continue. I knock occasionally and wonder over the bits
of time, shredded letterhead, sun

for it is summer now, and the price is found: hedonist,
basking as ever in the tiled and windless courtyard.

Borrowing

Here we are in the mouth of the Tui-bird,
you thrum echoes of sleep as song, I
weave coiling ropes of warbling erelong in flight.
Night nets the power of the ear,
megaliths, stone, divided, come near
to reveal two identical thrones.
It matters not

(whether they be)

whosever they be, these rattles of contraband,
we are the wheel on the incoming flow
that powers industry. Here today, riff
tomorrow, ripped off from bellows
and tips

(whatever they be)

pebbles or sin,
trouble by virtue of taken in,
(the source of the trickster is always within)
what were disguises become surmises

(whether they be)

bountiful of strains and stripes,
texture stomped from lily-white,
wine of the grain of the wood
where we perch, would
sing the day in its parts, do
sear the air with new, bright lines
of hooks reversed and untied from their judgments.

(Whether they be)

ours is in the art of exhibition.
Thorough prohibition is not possible,
for here comes the amber invasion, we're
surrounded by pillows, pervasive
suasion of suave and lonely conquerors,
consonant with our tuxedo links.

Floozy

Fancy! The architect stabbed an old thief skilled only in Butoh.

Cola, Pellegrino, sell no reality. The city surrenders.
For the chapped thief, Astrid fawns: apple of malfeasance. "Came in,"
last worry the uncle rode, falters the more. No bugles, some blue chins.
He's sober, Stan? Apologize. Cue the men, I go as the statue to hell -- hey!
Water cabooses cap the last Ave in Zion.

Pursue the crest of the rodeo.
Pews wrapped in cotton are raunchy food.
Pardon days, nude to let the nun satisfy.
He asks the cozy Satans if they float ugly. The carts of hay
descend to city hovels. Brillo keeps art in a freezer.
Seek a face of Apollo and alter the tremulous menu.

Lather in question soaks all of you. He treat you fatly. Bomb. Nuke the credulous.
Tornado. The contrubutors fancy that cunts are found lonely.

Slit scores of the stage add minutes.
He has more aspic tea for sopranos who totter.
Say Butoh tore its roots up.
He could surround the codependents. Still fruits count for shit.

Return aura's fancy boy, cozy and joined. He sure is the governor.
The rose, vice's journey, passes slow. No haunt though: print only
the leap of seven frogs stamping.
Super immobility tends to honey nuts of lanterns.

His anchor's so distended; even so, the celestial head operates.
Sulphur borrows cameras for solos. The sole temptation is statutory,
searching the tempo for precipice. Arrest? End?
Vipers flick and nullify: diction is to find her.

He toots, so candorously discusting.
These furrows force impetuous bells. Sing, Crispin: he swears by speech.
Pheromones are fragile: they cop to it late. Crabs and scabies.
The orgy of acquiescence, sap abandons: adios!

Fish here. Have no fear of falling razors. The rape is fortunate.
He jeers for a long time, calls for an end and sues to revolt the confident.
He has bitten cruelty's chintzy vine.

Bad Faith

My husband tries to kiss me in the wintertime.

The dock, in the summertime, floats on a champagne sky.
No longer concentric, ripples take the season off its string.

The lake is light, but probable, wherever it's exposed.

My face has claimed the evergreen horizon for its own,
the axe-bedraggled, mudslide-sideburned slope.

Husband is the guerdon in the vice of my periphery,
arresting me with skillful playing cards.

The planks proceed from the mossy uprisings of wave against log. The towel
that I lie upon is all my ages old; pink with the fading of reds.

The lake is light and probable wherever it's exposed.

Thank you is said to the ice in the clean, green glass;
plastic now muffles the shrill of its chill with the dull

cracks – now within the dock: unteachable width of plank
secrets away the hiccupping air, the eggs of frogs

shaven from one mass by bleatings of this other.

Pressures play their poker faces softly as chiffon against my eyes.
Lugubrious meets instant with an irritated charm.

“This is not pretty” answers every nascent plea for rest:
rust proceeds from huckleberry bush before appealing –

fresh and hoary white of salal bells wherefrom scraping wood extends.
Can my husband love me?

In winter, I am dubious of truly humid air. On the towel,
cavalier arches remain unconcerned in their refuge.

Splinters wait by the double-looped geometry of pink
to find their angle into the fresh blood of romance.

These pertinacious presentiments, crustaceans of the mind,
make my flesh confection of their diligence.

Landings happen here all the time, in the cove,
in the sweat under sunglasses' frames.

To my jugular, my chin, a scrappy fleeting, six legs
in one long gesture of circumstance, a beetle, a slap:

it was my hair. In the trees, a hawk is answered: cries for meat.
Pink and husband, frame, removed from the body,

reveal a jaundiced sky. Drifting lines of flouting bubbles inundate
my eye. I extend my towel with a pantleg, wait for blue.

The hawk replies, accomplishing the first in a series upwards.

I find grit between the threads and curse it there.

The fish held by the talons responds to the hawk:
the upward direction, so satisfying, is saturated: heavy.

I curse the rebel pressed against me always, curse as fair
this sandy and uneven distribution. My husband kisses me.

Again and away are lines that cross each other at some point --
is distance so reliable? Is the sun too hot?

What force is it that drops me so, and often,
from such impishly perambulated heights?

Can the osprey, fury, sun, love -- me?

Skinpricks

There were rodents,
mistaken for hedgehogs,
which, due to a misremembered tale

about hedgehogs
were allowed to come into the favorite room
by way of the largest door.

There was that time the chicken's leg
cried pink escape and blue return.
Unbakeable truth.

Napkins touched uncertain lips.
Gloves have refused to use sunglasses,
spited the unplumbed pocket.

The sound of pages turned but far too rapidly to read.
Ah. Desire that a wrinkle should rule the face,
exhort the onus. A course

in correspondence: shellgame,
practice selling distance to a neighbor,
keeping secrets under the stare of their makers.

I'd tell you, but the doors
both opened inward simultaneously,
bullying my body flat.

Not the one that appeared in the room,
pregnant and rubbing its nose,
but the prescient self

who should have known, who may have,
I would have, but space is so small.
There's no-one to introduce.

The woman throws a ball to make a baby,
taxes the late hours with grief.
There is no informant like the wind:

it takes for distribution what has once been goodly had.
Does not hold a space for those
who counterfeit impatience.

Three Needles

There were three needles,
one in my arm. I could not see the end.
Two were together, knit together perl

of great price, I said I would say when I tied it off,
turn off the drip, stop all this water
but the perls were the soft rosary of my moment.

Hail to the virgin wool, my marriage, my ring,
anything I had on hand.
Beth was the did she tell you type.

Molly could have got that at the store.
She could have gotten all the store
but never what she praised.

I cannot find my experience,
I said. I said, I knit until
I feel contractions coming.

Mmm. Said Molly. You, I said, look like
have you seen *Hud*? Be bold. Patricia Neale
has a voice like yours. And an Oscar.

What are you going to name your? Boy or Girl?
Ruby like the color of this yarn, the color of
blood is in the I would do

anything to help you, Sarah said
after the water, taking air. This pin,
the pain of shoulder makes answer

a muscle with memories. No, but between,
could you carry the echo? Get my cry
across the channel? Change it?

Yarn was the only long thing.
Short pieces pull me in --
Jesus, door slam, ignominious.

Treble clef, weensy whiney eenie miney
wash the spider out the up I've got you
under my skin. I hear the quotation,

continuing the quotidien; aphorism aphids
making possible the lives of honey ants.
We are the parasites of the honey smell of him, he eats

the long liquid beginning of me. Maybe
expanding will take what is now
there will never be an ending again

Nice to someone the other side. Take this.
Hold it, hold him, hold on; just one accidental press
in a string of pearls that button now to then.

Liar. That will never happen.
Have you ever read --
quit being a hostess, Nancy said.

Scream a little bit.
Host this is my body.
Do this, remembering the feet.

Longer than expected. Short fuse.
Blood was coming through the needle, I realize
now has the shiver of

what no longer matters but is red.
It has been stopped. Shiver.
Hey, Apotheosis, you are

Cold with the memory of silver,
my flesh, knit together pearl.

Gratitude for Blue

In the land of upright lives a color
formed in ice, in glacier's first
movement. In the sitting

of rest, the morning
after wind has tracked the fall,
stability shivers its test

through straight backs.
The hold brings the prompt
for newness: tumbling petals

of ice, delphinium of time,
flush the air of purpose, ring
thunder as hair swims,

retreating then to that beginning
blue, most tentative shoe, hanging
the wash before its wearing,

the hope of its hue containing
a message that carriage lives
in all things.

Doting Hero

An army of Persian ghosts
approaches its historian, listing vitamins
that would have been useful on ships of the dead,
prevented their story from being told
thus. Herodotus has no interest
in scurvy anymore. He holds the phone,
tries to trust the unblemished curve of handle.
Her emotive hush, the hope and crush,
the dream she has of a husband.
He privately doubts her sincerity,
but her wavering words remind him
of something. Echo convenes the parties
of confidence.

The Persians offer him
cucumber sandwiches. Herodotus
frowns, his hand flounders
in the air of his dismissal, sinks
to his knee. He pictures bald things:
eggs, Romans; wonders,
does a womb have hair?

The Persians want another thousand ships,
cities to conquer again. To be written up,
they promise him protection,
royalties. Insensate bodies on the sand
demand return on principle.
Is it all about location?
A hero, buried at city gates,
protected it without regard
to loyalties. Sacrifice avails. He could be,
he could have, so much. The dead
were not required to bend to hear

Herodotus listens
to Hystery's list of dates.
The boyfriends make him sad,
their physical impatience, their
affection for ignorance.
He clutches the phone and asks
questions. The Persians
threaten abandonment.
Herodotus throws them out,
excuses himself to Hysteria.

He no longer sees Persian ships,
but a flexing pear.
He ponders the use of address,
names that chart emotion,
wonders whether collected statements
of dislocation bleed.

Through the window, the Persians
threaten recursion, hold old times
like torches, threaten fire
to Herodotus' house. He can only
think of what he will say
when a suitor suits. Will he offer
his advice? He loves.
Will he speak what he knows
of wandering womb? Can he couch
that phrase? Rest in fairness?

Herodotus was an object of speculation
himself, once. The orange trees,
the scent their blossoms lent
to him are heavy, on his hand, now;
red marks. He vomits. His nausea
is extreme,

Herodotus
adopts his past as a woman.
He notices his body
as if he had known it before.
Hysteria travels, tenderness
bears fruit as assent cuts his vision,
his arm, with the salt of regret.
He has thus invented many motives,
baskets to hold a beloved
thornily near: a portable pain.

Alone now, Herodotus scrambles
to remove the straw from her bearing back.
What she remembers as wonderland
is marked in reluctantly tenebrous red.
She smells the faint imperative of iron.

Love, Letter

Thank you so much for the x x x x xxxxx.
Nicey, nicey, nicey, nicey, nicey.

Here for all those days and two more nights,
sitting [oh the tarmac] under a cotton-stricken bulb
to light upon
your package
in an unrelated
ambush.

Boy did we need [supplies.]

[first person entity,
argument for inclusion] so grateful that x
was able to make it to y.

Isn't [leviathan] funny? Well.

Peter's pears were left in the nethers of basket [x, for] weeks,
buried under the Easter grass.

China blue has never looked so green.

[CARRIAGE RETURN!]

mind?

Peter was wondering. Would you

moth's wing.

He's used to the grease of a

Too bad, too unexciting, whether a romp would pumpernickle you.

After the [gateau]. Arrived. I'm sorry. Halting. [Greeting what?]

Joseph is here, eating his curds and sway.

We have convinced him.

He plans to inch forward by morning.

No hard feelings, (we have been informed about the hinge)

-- ErrataP.S. Stormy whether. Knew you were here.

After What He Didn't Say

What could we sing with such upraised arms?
We gave it to the floor.

Ben was convinced of his own desire
to be a Red Indian.

He overrode cowboys,
consuming a great sadness at some point.

I was fullness crammed into the world.
Spirits were taken without concern.

“Not only for them were animals
a net to prism in,” said Benjamin.

Not only for them were the animals.
Not only the animals, they.

Reticule for a gathering din
of thanks.

“[I just] wish,” the focal point;
joint of a parroted bone.

His cough was the most advanced outpost.
My family, already home.

“Hunger is an impediment
on the way to menagerie.”

I thanked him for passing the turkey,
and asked him to swell for me.

Homage

The brisk mementos of pruning hooks,
clumsy in strawberry fields;

much more like one whom I'd met
than one who stayed remembered.

Mummified wanderings,
Turkish silt;

identities and sad dogs
know their loyalties.

Put the emphasis.
If only I could last.

One had grown extremely fat,
and was saying to the other

through lips pinched by weather
Koo koo cachoo.

Such wings are irreducible;
they bandy candy.

Parallel parking
is partially innate.

Compendium

You asked about the teardrop. I looked it up.
In the chests containing table games,
cardboard corners wear, and never mend.
Instructions belong to this box.
Consideration keeps the hand from holding
the inverted pearls it found in sorrow's holes.
Only the desperate company gets through,
clings in the rainy harbors of tent cloth.
"Don't" and "honey" turn their coward faces.
Edginess runs to play. Aspartame
desperation is doomed to circulate
pamphlets no-one picks. Elsewhere:
milestones are bent. The four eyes here
go bughouse together.
I can only appreciate you
a portion of time at a time. This is not
a Manichean poverty, a Man Ray tear,
a pear-shaped isolate on a cheek,
a capsuled quotient, fear. Coming to
what is, not is in the net, springing
with the rest of the haul to center.
Strands hold the heart of elastic fall.
You move one glass bead,
I put another down. There are
twenty now. Two
is just one of the numbers.

Notes on the Text

The first four lines of "The Rules" come from Mina Loy's *Songs to Joannes*.

"Overhead" was overheard at the Portland Airport.

Amplexus is a scientific term used by zoologists to refer to the mating clasp of amphibians.

Cane toads were imported to Australia from Hawaii in the early part of the twentieth century to eat the cane grub which was destroying sugar farmers' crops. The toads had eaten the grub worms in controlled circumstances, but in the wild would not dig for them and had no interest in catching the mature, flying grubs in their mating phase. These toads, due to a potent toxin which kills most predators and their strong mating instinct, have now overrun a third of the Australian continent.

Cheryl Glass was a real person. Stan is not.