Women As I Know Them

by

Helen Lawson

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To Women —
and Men — my friends.

I wish to remember with gratitude Fay Manus and Roisin Whelan who encouraged me during a difficult period of my life when these poems were written.

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MY BODY

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My body

My body
was beginning
to obey me
so well.
It was beginning
to behave
so marvelously
animal-like,
after the years of
tick-tacking.

And now again
failure comes,
perhaps to tell me —
what?
That there is no certainty
in any given path,
that the greatest
this life gives us
is just our
rise and
fall.

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Milking time

My Master came,
but only to survey,
to tease me.

Flesh is hanging heavy on me now,
it's milking time.
As I sit baring my teeth,
lovingly, smilingly poised,
lipsticked,
all the heifers of my blood moo
in my lap.

Is my Master afraid
of the prairie and the steppe,
the meadows in me,
of the grass he made me chew,
the cud,
those years of
obedient grazing?

The herd is unfulfilled,
it's mooing,
heavy-uddered,
painfully.

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Raven-like

You come, expecting kindness:
tall and stately, plain,
with an arrogance that takes
my humiliation for granted.

I serve you, dividing the clouds
for you
with my own hands,
while
raven-like,
calmly,
you peck into
what you regard a carcass
of his and my love.

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The scars on my body

Speaking about the knife:
it has been you,
who has turned
each decimal moment
in me
towards rawness
and blood.

The scars which now
provide at their best
a mask to hide behind,
a leer towards
the incomprehensible,
come out of the corrosion
you instilled in me,
when the contradictory swaying
of your genes
gained entrance,
poison-sweet,
into the abandoned slaughterhouse
in me.

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Back to one's butcher

The knife
keeps returning to
its owner
and I go back to you,
resentful, scared
of your big hands,
whose fingertips
so lightly stroke
the gashes they
once made.

As you lay spiced words
on my apple-blossomed wounds,
you only increase my sorrow
and my
loathing.

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REACHING OUT

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To my daughter Philippa

We are in it together,
the tight place.
Sun
does not get down
to us.
Earth in a knot
jammed between our bodies,
the smack of the devil on us
and the occasional leap
of letting go
our clasp.

Summer and winter we spin
the web of making-do.
To knead dung into flowers,
we step hard on the shovels.

You fix on me your eyes,
those luminous young spiders
and I hold the fire-curtain
of my face up,
while my mouth sheds droppings of prophecies,
you later help me stuff
in dustbins.

You are my flagella.
Your tentacle shall touch
tomorrow
the way a sea-anemone does
flat sand.

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Let us build

Let us build cathedrals
on the tails of snails,
on eyes that pop like
tulips,
on sand,
and on leaves
that curl up and
die.

Let us mold
bubbles of smiles
on skulls
from which profane flesh
has fallen,
on lips doomed to memory,
on dust.

Let us slide
shivering despair
down the glass-panes
of days
and let the smudges of
plastic ties
huddle us
close.

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To a West Hartford lady

Well-preserved prisoner bending towards life
with a permitted curve,
beautiful,
because this is a thing to be,
harpsichordish discords of you are
softened, thick-carpeted,
by the approval of mules that
swish their tails
to tickle you
a little.

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Last night

Last night
I was dreaming about death.
It came to me
in the form of a little Indian boy.
He told me how he went with his mother.
They traveled far
to deliver her baby.
He took his pet rat with him
and looked after it well,
while the pains of his mother
came and went.

I am not clever,
he said,
but I think
death is ugly.

The monsoon had not come.
They lay parched.
He made his rat
a little monument
of grey stone.
His baby-brother was
harder to bury.
The mother took fever
and was sick a long time
at the side of the road.

Death is ugly,
said the little boy in my dream.
I swear
I shall never die.

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Autumn

I have watched
the leaves fall
many times.

But this time really
the bell is tolling
to unadorned lips
over pancakes
unmaterialized.

Freedom agape
on a platter.

But softly, softly
around the corner
the chipmunks are
preparing
for the mating-dance
next spring.

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Winter love

That, too, is not the answer:
to clutch and to hold
the snout of trembling
under the waterfall
of darkness, the air embalming
blemishes, masquerading smoothness,
old hair on ends in delight,
teeth knocking together
in an unknown heath.

But what else is there?
Smothered cries of what we once
never dared to be, a shell of an ear
withered in too long straining,
a string's sob and the indolence of objects
we call home?

Crumple the harmonica, eat all the nightingales,
file your splintered bones and in that
sore chaos fly — straight to your target,
a sly silvery fish, in a cold, moon-rocked lake.

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Reaching out
(For G.M. Evica)

It's a case of not being afraid
to touch an unknown cheek
in darkness,
the beard one finds
is warm and spreads
down to the pubis.
Trills of sunlight
leap from there,
new vision,
a memory of a
cell about to multiply.

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WOMEN AS I KNOW THEM

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Virgin flight

Her breasts flew ahead of her,
the fiery eyes scared us.
We ran,
attempting to soften her fall.

Over the country roads we stumbled.
Dirt in lumps, stones, no comfort except
a few anemic poppies
on the bank.
Our eyes fixed upwards
we saw her Zeppelin curves
mockingly silver.

The sun blinded us.
We paused.
Down we lay, face down,
mouth opened, aware
of insects, dulled.

The cicadas hummed.
Summer night rustled the apple trees.
We kept our cheeks in the cool grass
and waited.

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Girl-friend

You are a brown temptation,
Marge,
towards gladness,
the slope of your hair
a halo,
as the garden gate swings open
back and forth.

I slipped in and plucked
a handful of raspberries,
freed my kite and let it soar
in your air.

Too long have I walked
muffled from wind and
women.
The tree in me stood
solitary,
but now, in you, sunlit,
the roots are mouthing
luscious soil.

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Old with Mozart and Vivaldi

And now Ella Davenport is
old,
the glory of her years
gone,
her breasts deflated bells
the sound of which
tolls only in
memory.

She squats on the three-legged stool
of time
gingerly staring
at glass cherries
in crystal balls.

Mozart and Vivaldi salt
her bitter path of
Gretel,
Johannes gone long ago,
while the Witch
from the Gingerbread den
beckons
unceasingly.

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Demeter
(For Ruth Whitman)

No longer afraid of aging,
I think of you, smiling lost island,
my adversary:
it will be lover-climbing
a mountain,
with you
on top.

You squat there at ease,
wide in your bare planes,
proud with lined apples,
your skin
drinking rain and dew
and ripening,
steadily,
as a setting sun
does.

You have plucked stars for radiance,
milked oceans;
now you shine,
a queen-god firmly female,
mother to
solemn little foxes
on your hillside.

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A fact to notice

Scavenger
of other people's
neglect,
picker-up
of crumbs and spills,
folder
of open newspapers,
renewer
of toilet-tissue,
sprinkler
of clogged drains,
polisher
of stubborn surfaces,
shaker
of worn mats,
spreader
of tousled sheets,
and many other
robots
a house-bug
has to be.

Wash your hair,
my sisters,
my darlings,
and join the dance
of sunbeams
on the tired grass.

It is in your eye
that light bends,
and your vision
of the whole world
depends on that
fact.

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Middle age

To rush to a young man,
to see his penis swell
like a peacock's tail,
round like a spaceship
before the drums
to forget the water-lily
smiles of women hungering
for wholeness,
to shed decency,
stretch to the beyond
of sense,
to be blind,
dazzled by the flight
of one's tiny
well-being.

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Nuclear family

I am scared of you:
scared of your bulbous anger,
your mustard heaviness,
your plodding, coffin-bound,
resentful shelter.
I am scared of the night
sealing you in like an envelope,
I am scared of each day
and its unease.

I am scared of myself even more:
a calculator, a ticker-tape, a hangman,
a fork of rust under the cuticle,
driving the sledge down, ears covered,
eyes swinging on a withered branch
never near.

I am scared of them most of all:
missing the train, not lapping up the poison-milk,
running honey from deceived smiles, vulnerable,
ready like swarming bees to be kidnapped,
purring flowers, never questioning
their right to
murder.

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A game for men and women

The taking down of panties
is a game
men engage in,
in spare time.

Women bear it
and play
at Sleeping Beauties,
making themselves believe
that their clitoris is
that luscious central Self
they themselves
have been
after.

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Bad women

Bad women live
forever,
in men's fantasies,
in memories
sweet with
hurt.

The best thing
good women
can do
is to die
and never feel
the grains of
bitterness.

To be good only
is a grave;
to be bad
is to ride ruthless,
victorious,
alive,
alone.

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Never again

I shall never love again,
never shall I open my body
to the whip of man,
I shall not
grovel longing,
nor titivate
every eyelash of me
for a male to
preen himself
on.

I shall never gather
the secret daisies of me
in a chain of pleasure,
I shall not rollick,
beg or lick
to be lifted up,
approved and
held.

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Song of a suffragette

I am annoyed
at the ambition
arising in me
daily,
and yet my ambition is
necessary,
it is a force
that brings my lips
some air.

I am frightened
by my white anger,
and yet my anger must be sharp,
to sever Me
from me.

I am bewildered
by the blankness
of the world I wish to join,
and yet the world must be blank
for me to
want it.

So I sing alone.
My house cries for attention.
So does the old me,
already buried alive.

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We are amazed

We kill
the inconvenient
and never wonder
about the panic of
spiders,
the anxiety of
flies.

We squash
them underfoot,
squeeze
them in Kleenex
or fix
them on boards with
pins.

Daily we destroy.
Each night
we rest
from slaughter.

When death comes
to take
us,
we are
amazed.

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i have the right

I have the right
to walk naked
before men
and let the world
see my glory
and the smudges of
scars
past blunders have
marked me
with.

I have the right
to let my
hair rise
in horror
at my
daring.

I have the right
to hug foolishness
and suckle each minute
like a
pig.

I have the right
to be
ugly.
I see
no thing more beautiful
than
this.

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CLOSED VISION

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Snake-mating

Humility seizes me
in my body's kitchen
before you,
breathing halts,
and this my twenty-first
wedding anniversary, ignored
by unvoiced consent.

Behind myopic eyes
I dance as you turn,
for you paralyze me.
Wholly crippled
like the leaves into gold,
I rattle with
the gravel beneath
your feet,
welcoming you
to strike me.

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God says we must love each other

Along the tongues of swallows
the evening was rollicked
in longing to meet you at random.
Anniversaried to nonexistence
the marriage-hen shed feathers.
We spoke of Apollinaire in class,
his many-faced eiderdown loving.
Late night sang with automobile
crickets, halting signs in the street
dead-ended home.

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Surreal

What is this you hold
in your hand, a dagger?
So un-American, no, it is
your heart, nurtured on
the Revolution, fathered prim
by Pilgrims. You cannot kill

me, I am
a woodcut by Dürer. Do not
doubt it. When next Christmas
you mistletoe your students,
I shall be a willow at the
frozen pond, weeping.

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Closed vision

You rise
in my eyes
an Emperor.

Marauding hordes
ride over me.
I drum amongst

the hooves, while
you, Roman, build
in me your tower.

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Golden age
(After Buñuel)

Dearest, let us not allow
the scorpion of fear
to sting us! As we move
stones, we shall unearth
it, claws and back hunched
to strike. Let us recoil
from it together, our own arms
an armor. Let love
spring from your mouth's
hillock, to bury the fiend
by laying it bare.

Let us unleash the horses,
and lead them to a paddock.
Moon may render us mad,
the king-flesh hold us
in towers, but let us not
allow the scorpion of fear
to strike us in our pastures.

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Harmony

In Marvell-like health
I watch my body glow
younger, skin-taught.
I am a keyboard uncovered,
Mozart runs through me
even when your skilled
fingers are resting.

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Ours is

a once-a-month love. Gold
September in your eyes was
that first amber
crashing, the mute flesh
obedient marking us.

October was sorrow, was thorn-
gathered, was memory gulping
your second unwilling giving,
the / cannot do it, was
a yellow sob, was fever.

The most-natural-thing-to-do-
chain-of-daisies was November, was
a sleazy-wheezy whistling boy,
was four seasons balloon-tumbling,
was poppy slopes, was melons.

This the first December you
in my wheat-filled fields,
corn fingers anticipating my
thighs, the unreason of all things
living filling my lungs with promise.

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Ravenous

More snow
has made the earth
heavy.
I exercise to see
if I am as muscular
at least, as your pallid
sobriety.
The cats rush indoors,
ravenous.
You are in an
ironic distance.
I concoct myself
tales
with you as
archetype.

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You in me

not just a memory
of flesh, a glow of future
embraces, but my own blood
leaking and foaming in smiles
as you enter the brain's cave.

Unobtainable, tall you tower.
Like frost the window-panes, this
disciplined season of houses chains me.
In the pit of winter solstice
the just pine trees are ice-free.

I desire no prison, only
the movement of an instinctual dance,
ever changing. To my present pilgrimage
you are a Mecca, a people
rigidified into an idol, an oracle

barred from the sound of its own stream.

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NO NAME

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Mea culpa

The murderer of his parents
stood up and proclaimed
a fast on himself. The pain in his
knee smarted. The nets were cast
firm. Mosquitoes swarmed a sea.
Now only perversity satisfies
sky's fringes. Paraffin lamps burn
low and today is inflammable.

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Il pagliaccio

1. Torn is the swan's libretto and the child
behind the mascaraed eyes lies sobbing
under the willow. His army coat is
seamless, it covers the sores which
whisper to each other. Mother's stiletto
heels vandalize his flesh through the pocket,
stillborn in the groin with a rosary.
There is no end to the beginnings, says
the child, wild-eyed, becoming a nipple
of ambrosia, gulping the beatitude of suckle.

2. Voices in the wall tell me to let go,
receive the bullet. The garrison stands
poised. A skylark laughs in the turnip
field while mother's skirts cover the
mountain. Soon there'll be no pain, only
the ploughing of my flesh and a small red river.

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Just because

a woman cut off
your limbs and rolled
down lisping
strawberries on a parched
slope in whiskey bottles
in your rosebreasted memory
you need not lash
my birches into mud
bury me in pots of ice
within your eyes' hatchets

i walked meek under your tongue
said shhh to the hair of my armpits

dig your tongue in my ear
as you used to
slit your vein
for the beginning of your breath

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Old story

You cut me with words
but bind me with kisses.
On dusty hills you abandon me,
then shower balsam.

Eros strums his melody,
scales your ear, dulcimers
wine down belly. Your Good
Samaritan veins rear.

Will this Mercy-flagellation
continue for ever? We could
donkey together in harmony,
bray yes to Savior-love,

turn together the wise way
like a sunflower.

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Childhood scene

Ridiculously, I fell in love with your name even,
having grown up with the wheat. I like everything
corny and your name is that. A farmer's daughter,
it was not its phonemes which appealed to me, but
the grain at my hips, a handful of it against the
palm after thrashing, even the dross, the husks
blown to a heap, the deprived straw, its banding
and storing for the winter.

I wished to recover from you a parched lawn, the
hired workers on it eating lunch, beer in hand.
And the worn wicker basket throning near Mother's
knees. I used to carry it with her from the kitchen
steaming with sausages and rolls. The best part of
each summer was this, a Hogarth garden party:
simple women, dusty and tired from the machine, but
joking, teasing the men through their missing teeth.

Mother had an apron on, hair tied in a kerchief
deep into the forehead. Not touched you, Mother,
a long time, not since I reared before the reins
in your eyes, beside the coffin. You wore your best
shoes then, I remember. Always accomplished a good
exit, wanting to be missed, or perhaps once you did
not. How to be a mother to myself, this you might
have taught me. Would have passed the parcel on,

to husband, friends, children. How does one master
this kind of farming? By clinging to names of
strangers? The world is a narrow alley and most
loves finally lead to a parched lawn.

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No name

I shall cut you from my eye as a nutshell.
No, no more begging of you even if flowers
dangle smiles in windowpanes and lightning
hatches sudden bird babies! I must drive you
to a room underground and not visit the sly earth.

Your ghost I shall thrust from vision immediately
it enters, stuff my ears with mandolins and not
hear your knocking and wailing, the rattling of
the oozy shutters and other unearthly manifestations
of what once was a summer body to me, chest

graying and windswept like slopes of Acropolis.
I will not allow your mild breath to envelope me
in moist whirlpools of wonder, no. I shall ask ice
in blocks, putrid rain to aid me, crocuses even, dogs
merrymaking, monkeys in my veins to keep up apart.

I shall pluck the nutshell of you from my eye and grope
sightless rather than carry in me your hardness,
muster young girlfriends to bar the dark passage you
know to my sofa. But you own the key from my house
still and my burglar alarm remembers you a friend.

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NO LONGER

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A spouse

He listens to sad tales about husbands,
taking notes, preparing himself as a bride
for the woman he has lived with 27 years,
whose skin is his, fallen breasts his property.

He walks back into his youth, makes it with her,
they start all over.

Women shower around him unnoticed, weeping.
To pave old streets, he bends to tear up cobblestones,
blocks his ears before church bells,
gives nothing to beggars,
crawls tired into wife's belly,
bursts into blossom for a season.

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A visit
(For Nancy)

We could not discuss anything with
six children around and you set
on trying the popcorn-maker.
Still, you stripped unasked while
the Japanese girl sat unblinking
under her black suit. Face swam
lined, sun hardened, and there was
something sharp cutting the air,
a cold coming on, you said. Dear!
Stop fleecing the sky! The body,
too, is a liar. Grass won't do it,
nor the young elephant boys, tail-trunked,
parading to be whipped. Lie still,
point ears. Let crickets overtake the
drum, turn fingertips lemon tender,
till pupils kiss the retina.

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A tale

The future has hen's feet
like Baba Yaga,
child is covered with eyes
as it gazes at them.
Snow rusts disheveled
courtyard, early combine
sprawls, wind at its screws.

Smell of clumsy manure
as flies buzz over the
Bundtcake, brought in like
childhood without its
navel. The dog kennel
is hollow, was once a beer
barrel, the ghost of the white
shepherd that died of ear
trouble guards it.

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Getting the ingredients together

My husband and I
shall soon get talking.
The phone rings: Claudia
wants to know how much is
½ cup of butter on the stick,
being in charge of her
little brothers, making
something, as she says,
a surprise no doubt for her
mother, who herself may be
talking to her husband soon.
My daughter is sleeping after bad
earache. But surely we are more than
mules carrying children as
burden. We must stop, we
must hee-haw, and perhaps
canter free for a change.

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Divorce

That was
cruel
seeing you in your
narrow tie
your shoulders
face younger hand-
somer in well
lapelled grey
suit.

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A plot

not a star's chip
but another paternoster
pope-nosed miter-grounded
mud-stuck and that running along
colts' calves will have to remain
thrown towards feathers of twilight
or to the hungry cheeks of
frog moments that say hello to
each other across the same idiotic flesh
air-grasping

i am telling you to go see
those Virginia Woolf roses
between the acts unrehearsed
while the sun summer-foams pines
into violoncello-singing tickles mars
red still leave me fast
potter by wife skirts plotting
mama bound

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Departure

Now, alone, face all
the horrors you have dreaded,
those paths with slippery stones
winding a brittle mountain,
a precipice at arms' length
and darkness descending.

This turning of the dream
flesh outward, this
reality, nightmarish
joy of what blood absorbed, then
spilled, this being coloring
sunsets, darkening nails

that would have buttercups
rather, this ancient landscape
each life-death is when
finally perceived,
embrace it, swallow again,
let germinate!

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Hana

She had lost weight
and heavy undershadows
made her eyes Quaker cold.
House unusually untidy,
mouth bitter set, her
husband left in September,
asked for his freedom
and she said, So go.
Thirty years of marriage,
babying her man, has
left her unromantic, tepid
towards others. Nor does she
ponder loneliness. Out of
joint, locked in Yalish
ghetto, she dreams of Austria,
an almost home, once frequently
visited. Doubly alien and now
worse than widowed, she translates
the book she wrote in cousin
German into foreign English.
Her father had a coal business
like mine, in the old country,
we are almost sisters. I shall
bear her in mourning.

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Thanksgiving

Gentle hands were needed,
penis piercing soul clouds,
Venus mists. In this dark sea
she stood the shark sharp-
nosed, a spongy horse-sea-she.
Each ship was bound to wreck
and gather sand at bottom,
broken masts targets for
minnows, binding memories
of currents, directing dreams.
Now that she-sea is glad
that ice had scarred her
tender surface, coral
lands submerged and hid,
islands sank eager for journeys
with pearls entombed in
wombs oyster-tightlipped, in
hot world of loose-haired
naiads, amoeba-bound, erupting.

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in the hope-wood

i still want most of all
to be somebody's girl,
a little ball of spikes
on the road for a truck
to roll over, a tenderbellied
hedgehog, a bloody fist.

years hang on trees
like poisoned lollipops,
alice's falling down own
well, stalking wise man's
sayings, friend of naive
butterflies, in the vagina

is silence and nothing,
white termites softly
float death, a stubborn
metronome, in fallible
bim-bams, illumines
skull's sockets.

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Elizabeth

My oldest daughter plays the Fugue in C minor
by Bach, tripping with wet fingers, nails rose-colored.

There is a waterfall near her ear,
a dish of strawberries in her groin.

Her skin is rolls fresh out of good oven,
butter-melting. She is fifteen and three quarters.

I am steel bars, circling around her,
to keep the world from its devouring.

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encounter
(For C. B.)

on sunday we met. my children were
away and i was leather in beige
boots from heel to neck, since,
dreams have sprung headlong,
i am born a woman desired, scented,
in andalusian veil, cicada-grunting.
this wood is summer-new, scary,
better let me freeze thus, mascara-d,
pleasure-freed, one caught line on
page underscored in life's script,
doomed, rosy metador of skirts,
you, by the roadside lurking, fist
of thunder near earth unplowed,
plain-singing.

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Fall of titans

Let's never meet in February
so I shall not give you a
turkey pie for breakfast
when you want toast, my
darling, my darling, not
tear your jacket in shreds,
swishing in green circles,
neighing a crazy fantasy,
broom on fire. Let's not cloud
blue hills as we did last year
same month, and yet: pain binds
like blood and even angels sin,
actors slip faulty gestures,
and Sarah Bernhardt charmed,
despite her wooden leg.
Let's go back therefore, not call it a
February, but a flight of captured
eagles. The nest we have holds
two, is high, waiting.

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Reflection

I want to be an alligator
in a Florida swamp and live on
fish. What I have learned so far:
Water is important because chemicals
are needed by the cells to dissolve in it.
All living depends on green plants
for food, though other substances
in addition to glucose are required.
Fungi help in breaking wood down to its
basic particles. Fresh supplies of
elements from environment over and over
must be found. Most kinds of female
fishes lay tremendous numbers of eggs.
Frogs are born in water but the placenta
inside the walls of the womb. What I have
learned so far is this Hydra budding.

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All hollow

I was mourning your departure
like a driftwood on a beach
dusk slapping my side all hollow
with twelve sixty in the bank
to last thirteen days and one
birthday with ten presents to buy
for Philippa fourteen on the
twenty fourth which gives us
exactly a dollar a day
for the four of us

And for five hours I have not
written you a letter nor
committed suicide though you
cried jump jump to me
from your garlanded precipice
after I spread before you
all the shades of my vomit

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Bionic

I'm tired of presenting myself
squirrel eyed, the weakling
with a squint and limping under the
table, bubble in a crooked pond,
a dictionary midget amongst
crumpled pages.

A woman of highways will I be,
the wheelbarrow of my pelvis
hooked to Apollo projects,
through America's milky way
will I zoom bionic, instinct
and reflex in abeyance.

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exodus for moses

pockets of snow, air
breast-heavy, brother
aaron went bankrupt on a day
like this. now i am. reaching.
you. would appreciate it much
if you could spare the time
to fuck me. monday. sure i
think it a good idea
to have this. talk,
if for no other reason than,
the fact, with you away
so long i go dry. do not. make,
even a middling, line, not been
touched by. man. for
months, the exception of
when you. came, people
hungry, honey, your voice,
is my tongue, my prophet,
jahveh's commandment before
which i. quake, remotest tower
in pharaoh's egypt are you,
dream-infilling, with mead.
the sea divides for
army, we then red-
sight, promised land.

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Curtains

Others go
to confession,
you to me.

We make
poetry in
bed, eating

strawberries,
shutting door
in time's face,

firebugs our
eyes, cream
skin-lapping

bird's throat you
on wet bough
trilling.

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Imitation mayonnaise

I'm being divorced
and there is neither
margarine, nor crisco,
oil or vinegar even in the fridge,
Margaret used imitation mayonnaise
to spread her school sandwich.

I'm a woman again,
I think,
the world has many doors,
at least one mine.

Will have to take in my children
as my language, make this vast USA
private, a plot in me.

This moment of oscillation
is not new, the sea knows it.

I stagger out
ahead of armies. My flag
caught by the wind
has a following.

We are a regiment of beggars
and half frozen butterflies,
but we march, sometimes crawling
on stumps. When a woman has watered
herself at the right spring,
she can
stand.

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Horn of plenty

Like the leaves turning,
so will my days be,
each on a single stalk
hanging, unpredictable
in its hue, the stance
it shall take and which
of its sides will
face the wind.

Autumn is not the only season
of foliage, though this is fall
for me, without apples and
baskets, ladders, tree trunks
to lean them against.

Cherries? They neighbor in
spring, held as earrings
make a boy's mouth water,
green-swinging. But summer skirts
the peach which sun-skips
into September, dubs it
Indian. Then plums descend
naturally, when ready.

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Bread stales

That dreadful thing, love, is no longer for me.
I must forget its orange hallucinations,
its aluminum tantrums.
The crooked tooth juts from a gum of time,
cherry babies yawn in their unborn pleasures,
and the violins scrape madly on the trees
of dawn, crickets' feet suffer from gout,
apple trees have sucked, and now they cannot.

Through nightmare calves are born,
mothers lick placenta from them,
a farewell to oneness that was,
which growth disrupted.

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Her hair is long and blond

(For P. L.)

Another day beginning with the sun
but the body seems hardly worth preserving.
I think of the friend who lives with a
gambler she loves. Her hair grows
longer and longer.
Writing words is the easiest thing.
Must train feet into
the land of the living.

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Awakening

My beloved's hair is graying
and he loathes haircuts.
On his upper lip the hair
grows impudent black:
it sprouts each time I kiss it.
In the armpit my darling
sleeps humble brown,
a dark child refusing
the morning, but on his
belly, oh, a dance of satyrs,
red-limbed Pan's pipes, maple
leaves, hot orange curled
cinnamon smelling where red
angels yell. Push through
to sunlit patios, adder
pastures, twigs and strawberries
wild-nippled, stubby fox fingers
eager to service nutmeg hills.

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No longer

The horizon stares orange through the jalousies.
Yesterday's Harpies could have been this moment, had not
a fervor to consult swallows' feet possessed me.
Your jagged hair no longer frightens my spittle. We
merely set battalions of scissors to slay each other,
shepherd-herded what we counted beasts in our care.

I know my mirror image will thunderbolt you despite your
Hector's armor, lilacs will dig in your throat and clap the
syncopes of me on your eardrum. For I have yawned into you
with scales, a live trout, sunk my teeth into the delicate
lining of your stomach. I press sour on your left kidney and sorely
point the pores of your outer derma in sweat. I may wait

for you on the forked road or I may play marbles with my girls
instead in my childhood. Do you hear the reeds' sonata at the pond,
the dragonflies' cocoons, in A-minor? The cars are in Hades,
also I must tell you a Chimera gate-crashed to the volcano
of your palace. So you must crunch the IBM typewriter underfoot
with the autumn cornflakes, decapitate your scholar's chair,

bury your one human Hydra head under a surprised pillow.
Unless you purchase me on Saturdays instead of a radio,
mustachios will droop on the tightlipped ventriloquist!
I say this in purple darkness but my lips are already slitting
the walls of the igloo. The maze of thorns you planted is
opening like rows of confetti. You may embrace me or that

other me, also a woman, through your eyelashes, smiling.

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Prodigal friend

I shall be a prodigal friend
returning to my own outstretched
arms, ready to lie a sunny patch,
a woman spread like a sheet of
rescue, a verandah of sweet smelling
carved wood, all curves and Paisley patterns.

An iris monument to eyes will I be
before my own window to my breath'
delight standing, each single
leaf of me erect to pleasure and,
oh, the fingers of wind will
play me, my blood words warm,
held, pulsating.

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