SAMPLER

Some Perfect Year
SAMPLER
Cameron Gearen

Some Perfect Year

Shearsman Books
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For Cleo and Iris.
*Take my lantern for your piecework.*
And for John and Ann Gearen
with love and gratitude.
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To stir would be to slip—
To look would be to drop—[…]

Seed—summer—tomb—
Whose Doom to whom?

from ‘A Pit—but Heaven over it—’
Emily Dickinson
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Invitation

Come with stones and a selectively green car.  
I’ve set aside a weekend for crying and sleeping.  
You weren’t there when I stretched the laundry crossways.  
Wishing a homestead, wailing like that hound.  
Doors sound like airplanes taking off.  
If I thought you were listening, love.  
She ledged herself until they came to get her.  
She talked like stroll was a word she liked.  
I hated the room’s corner: intimate.  
I learned night is a lamp to turn off, lasts.  
City, erase me. Mail me stamped and worn.  
Body knows the slow stall into long night’s sleep.  
The table yawns between us.  
Neat lines grade my page gray.  
I beg you to calculate the burnish hue.  
She had a fine haircut but her teeth were stained.  
We’re out of dish soap. I terrible and I wish.  
Aerial not the fountain’s best view.  
If I thought you were listening, love.  
I’ll be standing in line at the post office.  
Come by if you want to see me.
Fun with Dying

The year you died was gala festive. Didn’t I party dress for monthly plane flights from my lake to your ocean? Each time you gauntly greeted, your skin poked carbon blue where needles entered, the strange shunt dangle from its temporary home, you St. Sebastian and your arrows. Your girl and I ate out and brought you cheese. We tooled Seattle like tourists, its single rainless winter we sequined, brought you accordioned nosegays. You seemed to like hospital sleeping, fluttering nurses to morphine drip. Sometimes we restauranted sans you. You loved to see us glow and we obliged. Layers peeled you papery, trapeze-artist light, your fingernails gone to skin. The drugs took your hair and left you seal-smooth; carved chin to chisel, lashless eyes, the shell melting and your warm core soaking sheets, turning toward the grisly plants we windowsilled. We shopped that city, found expensive knits, boutique sweaters with slate buttons. We bought eyeliner by the tub. Your girl, she held my hand while yours skeletoned. Nothing you said when we asked what gifts. I zipped my knee-high boots, she fastened her trench, breezed out. We always smelled of apricot scrub, avocado. Why would someone stay bedside, listen to a rattle? Rattles come from coughs and lead to comas.

We weren’t the knitting type, we had exhausted crosswords. It was you who urged us go, a day not circumscribe our wantings. We wished you well again and burly but turned your sick ghoulish. The doc and residents predicted nine more months—a long time in my short life. Let’s go, he wants us to, I told her and we left you again, bright things to be bought, a turquoise scarf my neck needed, crème brulée I loved to its caramel end. You lay
thirty-nine mixed years quilted on your rotten body: thought things through.
Set the pillows, rode the angles, fresh from your sponge bath. You knew the shift change rhythm like a poker hand. Nightcap nurse took your vitals and we dropped off a confection. When months ticked through
to April, we all agreed it had been a beautiful year and a fine one for dying in.
No one could say when a starless Washington winter had glimmered so.
or flu can burn sound through a house this pale one not the black next farm eight miles they said black soil black painted earth horse and buggy my great-grandfather but it’s a neat sound black soil let’s build on it horse and buggy neat doctor neat evening neat piano my grandmother age five then or six neat sound she had been to the henhouse pair of shoes only for that couldn’t reach was her father ill the flu burned through this pale house painted black sun magnet fertile like soil sound as in neat outside found soil/corn/silo ears they fed the pigs pair of shoes for walking in chicken shit shoes dumped crusted in the mud room doctors made house calls nowhere for that flu to sound no host victim carrier for eight miles round so it killed him 1918 then grounded drying rack for bodies city apartments a day’s ride away Chicago left his family itchy wife expecting the fourth neat sound sound sound rattle wheel or a rooster but only him there weren’t any neighbors to speak of to infect corn mostly some soy some tobacco in Chicago some stayed alive to carry corpses four flights down she watched her daddy’s body roll away in the hearse remembers how the horses strained silent under the coffin’s weight
Local Attraction

Barbed wire knot I know your worthy hitch. Visit beautiful Sundown, where oil wells seek gold. Burrs invest embed my sock jeans boot skin. I think if they stop fighting, my father and his girlfriend, the one who leaves her wadded panties behind the door. For what exactly did I fly here besides the grown-ups said? But they’ve boozed since morning Bloody Marys, handing off their vodka-soaked celery sticks to me, laughing too loud at Kotex commercials, now driving this barren grid past the cotton gin’s buzz, past the cemetery, to Sundown, a curiosity. I can’t get their attention. Crouched between tumbleweeds, lodged on red dirt where nothing grows, I’m picking burrs from my own ankles. I can do this. Sometimes I clean their dingy panhandle ranch house, babysit her hungry girls. I could make you an omelet, bring it to you in bed. In June I’ll be ten. His morning coffee drowns what sweetness. Summers like this I grow up sleeping on the green velveteen couch, rubbed bare where my knees seek a groove.
Compounded

Hanging lamps dangle over no table.
Witch hazel hands. When the child was small.
You know the list. It starts with silk.
Blind TV shouts Mandarin.
Rubble lot, transport me.
We stack suitcases like popsicles: red green pink.
A place is an envelope for memory.
Like blisters, the inside manifests.
Rust can orange and brown and cut open.
I drip water over American coffee.
We’ll give you the hero’s welcome.
My little slice of heaven: the stinking downstairs store.
The body hiccoughing flamboyance, buoyancy.
The courtyard shows foresight.
Stitching on a red slipper.
Burgeon is a word about growth.
Tingle itch swarm the window.
Cities matter mightily and I’m in one.
Where’s my ladder, means of egress?
What you say is whole my mortar.
Skin poison to the edge of membrane.
Colored newsprint rubs my hands solid.
Buzzered gate: tip the guards.
You say arrive.
You stand in the window and say arrive.