

SAMPLER

Bird-Woman

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Em Strang

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Shearsman Books

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chook, chook, tchink, tchink, tchink

– Blackbird

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Apokatastasis

Light, a bird's nest.

A garment of woodpigeons, *ru-hoo ru ru-hoo*,
nodding off in the hems.

Waking up in a place
where great northern divers
are old throats from the other side,
where nothing any of us can speak of
seems real.

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Bird-Woman

Nothing is yet in its true form —C.S. Lewis

The bird-woman is in the field in her blue dress,
small bird wrapped in a rag of cotton in her hand,
legs like twigs, throat between songs.

The sunlight is squeezing her, squeezing the field-grass
until her blue dress is a distant boat
and the field is the sea,
somewhere used to slipping boundaries.

Then two men, hands in pockets,
feet sinking into the grey-black of the road.
The sun is hot and high and they wade into the field,
lose themselves to the waist in straight, green blades.

The bird-woman is scuffing the soft, loose earth,
making a bowl for the body.
She lays the bird with its broken neck
and covers it with clover,
small red flowers, lucky leaves.

When the men capsize her
the pleats of her dress unfurl.

The ground takes their weight.

Bird-House

You won't believe me when I say
the house turned into a bird and flew away.
It was midday and the looestrife was blowing
all the way through the fields to the burn
where I crossed over barefoot, knowing every pebble,
every slippery spot. The path takes a sharp turn
like a changed mind, and then the old stone steps,
the nettles and the gate which opens on its own.
The front door had grown in the sunlight,
had stretched and snapped into a sharp, tight beak
with nares like spy-holes looking into the hearth
of the bird. All cross-beams and timbers had turned
into thin, hollow bones, hooking the wings
and the flesh of the thing to its dreams.

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Paris Hotel

There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. —Michel Foucault

When the maid comes in with breakfast
astonishment
spills over the bed
like sunlight
over our young flesh.
The maid smiles
at the pains au chocolat
and all the times
she's quietly combed her hair
are in the room with us.
We are trapeze artists —
that's what
comes to mind
as she stands waiting,
unsure.
From where I'm lying
I can see your pants on the bathroom floor.)
When we look at each other
the doors and windows
expand,
warp
like fairground mirrors

and your cock is a baguette.

After a while, she sets down the tray –
there is jam; there is hot tea

in spotless cups like milky moons.

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Penelope

It's true the door no longer fits the frame
and the windows are blown out.
Someone's been in and torn both our names
out of the curtains, the bedclothes, even that
stout little dresser we bought in the driving rain
that day I suddenly knew it was my fault –
that if I hadn't loved you so much (God, it was insane)
you wouldn't have left. No doubt
I learnt something valuable. Perhaps
I finally overcame the need to be near you,
to decorate the house with travel photographs and books,
that quaint framed poem you wrote one summer,
the one about the woman with small hands from Lastur in Spain,
who said the only way to make you listen was to shout.

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Her Indoors

She's quieter than usual,
barely a trip-trap to the fridge,
brown hide soft as a rug,
eyes full of long-forgotten stories
that came from the hills
and returned to them.

She noses out green vegetables –
winter cabbage, chard, kale –
and tosses them into a pan,
dainty hooves like ash buds,
agile limbs that restrain themselves
between cooker, worktop, bench.

At 6 o'clock he'll be in
all antler and hill-breath,
canter tales that wind up the kids;
he'll sit himself down
with his haunches splayed
and bellow about the rut.

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The Room

But someone, something's responsible for this. —Raymond Carver

It's like a Renaissance painting
only the men are naked, too.
One woman – breasts on her belly like French butter pears –
and twelve sacred men
quickly circling in a dusky room in a northern city.

Later, out of nowhere, two roe deer enter
and the room gets warmer.

Some of the men poke and shoo the animals
but soon the whole room is full of deer
and the men are standing among the herd
in the deep warm dark
and the woman is watching their shapes;
the winking of skin and eyeball in the moonlight.

Who knows what room this is.

The deer are quiet,
muzzles mapping the space.

Wolf

For D

Die Welt muß romantisiert werden. So findet man den ursprünglichen Sinn wieder. Romantisieren ist nichts, als eine qualitative Potenzierung. —Novalis

She has bent all night
in and out of the backwoods,
her bones looking for a way
through the pink flesh, the silver coat.

All night she has searched,
combing the woods, combing the winter river,
chalk stones redoubling the moon,
salmon ghosting the banks like a slip of the tongue.

Something has led her here
to the foot of the long hill
the trees cutting a hole in the night,
more night on the fields than she's seen before,
the mountains hovering like hawks.

When she finally reaches the gorse
she catches her breath
on its thorns, curls herself into her sleep-shell,
her belly haunting her, her body shedding its shade.

It's dawn when I find her,
grief-stiff, the rooks lifting and re-settling,
lifting and re-settling,
the sun beginning to burn.