Fani Papageorgiou
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When You Said No, Did You Mean Never?
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When You Said No,
Did You Mean Never?
The Riddle

Around the 1840s, a Danish traveller to Hamburg, Count Schimmelmann, happened to come upon a small itinerant Menagerie, and to take a fancy to it. One day Count Schimmelmann was sunk in contemplation of the Hyena, when the proprietor of the Menagerie came and addressed him.

‘Your Excellency does well to look at the Hyena,’ said he. ‘It is a great thing to have got a Hyena to Hamburg, where there has never been one till now. All Hyenas, you will know, are hermaphrodites, and in Africa, where they come from, on a full-moon night they will meet and join in a ring of copulation wherein each individual takes the double part of male and female. Did you know that?’

‘No,’ said Count Schimmelmann with a slight movement of disgust.

‘Do you consider now, your Excellency,’ said the showman, ‘that it should be, on account of this fact, harder for a Hyena than for other animals to be shut up by itself in a cage? Would he feel a double want, or is he, because he unites in himself the complementary qualities of creation, satisfied in himself, and in harmony?

In other words, since we are all prisoners in life, are we happier, or more miserable, the more talents we possess?’
Dark Matter

In physics we call it dark because it doesn’t radiate.

In Greece it can be stork nests in the bell tower, moss on the flagstones, a dull pain in the sky.
Ovid

There is a story
that friends visited him one day
and begged him to remove
three disastrous lines from his vast oeuvre.

‘Certainly,’ he replied
‘but there are three lines
that I will not remove’
and the selections
were of course identical.

Do not ask how many miles you have gone.
No, ask how many remain.
Bleach

All you need is egg whites, vinegar and soap flakes
We’re obsessed with getting it right.
All pure honey will granulate
and you can make anything you want.

During the First World War, pits from olives,
peaches, prunes, cherries, dates and plums
became carbon for gas masks.
Longing

She calls it something blue.
I call it Andrew Carnegie
controlling the price of steel.
Walking down the street
knowing there is one person
you have to live without.

Life is tenuous
and there will be glassware in her chest.
Write down what you love.
Hapax Legomenon

A word that occurs only once
in a language's recorded texts
or in an author's body of work.

I'm waiting for something to happen,
thought Cordelia,
and then it did.
Lear speaks of shadowy forests and plenteous rivers
but never discloses where his palace lies.
We imagine the logs freshly hewn,
the china blue sky.

Someone always wants you to give up,
thought Cordelia,
and she just couldn't stop walking.

You heavens, give me that patience,
patience I need, says Lear,
every inch a king.
Come on, let's ruin each other's lives,
says Cordelia.
Legend

*Constantine Paleologus, the last Byzantine Emperor was not killed when Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453 but disappeared into a wall and will return when the time is right to retake Constantinople.*

Karen learns about it in primary school.
This is when she starts to notice empty space is affected by gravity when she can only go ahead by avoiding cracks on the pavement her feet close enough to the cleft for the racket in her head to go away and for the first time she hears silence as if the streets were laid with straw the way the palace guards had muted the sound at Queen Victoria’s funeral.
Stating the Obvious

The sky appears blue during the day because of a process known as Rayleigh scattering. More of the blue light reaches us than other colours in the spectrum.

People see what they feel on everything around them—on the houses and trees and poles and power lines and mostly in the sky.

Almost everything happens in language.
The Mood

Isn’t the genetic language of all life the same?
The sea that laps the town
the man who casts everyone aside
the girl waiting on a bench with empty hands
the water in the ocean—choppy and full of shadows
the dreams where kestrels are eating up the sun
any single life which reaches the middle so quickly—

what diminishes constraint diminishes strength.
Tea Stains on Cups

A cloth sprinkled with salt,
that’s all you need,
her grandmother said.
One day you have to learn to keep house.

Don’t leave smears on objects.
Remember Virgil, her mother said,
there are tears in things.