

The Purloined Letter

SAMPLER

ALSO BY FANI PAPAGEORGIU

When You Said No Did You Mean Never?

Not So Ill With You and Me

SAMPLER

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The Punished Letter

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No Need to Argue Anymore appeared in *The Baffler*

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“The intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident.”

– Edgar Allan Poe

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To

*Aris, Sophia, Ian,
Konstantinos & Artemis Stephanakis*

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Seagulls

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1.
We have no peace.

2.
We can tell you how we walk around twenty miles a day.
How the clean wind is blowing on the coast.
How it is not possible to measure pleasure.

3.
We walk along the coast every day
and the trees tell us we will have a long life.

4.
We spend time losing things.
Poplars look like ghosts.
We will take away everything you have, they whisper.
How they have tormented us.

5.
There is a terrible racket in our heads.
If we do harm by walking into a darkening garden,
what is it about the pain of others?

6.

We're ravenous here.

Can't you see.

Walking is not about shedding burdens.

7.

On the train from Paddington to St. Austell,
reaching the South Coast,

we could see the tides from the window
small dinghies on the sand.

Life is like that.

8.

Connect these dots:

National Trust, wooden gates bleached by the sun,
seaweed and driftwood on a beach,
fields with muck by the ocean, sea air,
church, tombstones, palm trees.

9.

We eat Cornish oysters freshly plucked from their beds.

There is a storm outside the French windows

and for a minute it feels as if response

is the most profound measurement of consciousness.

10.

We get scalded when we brush our teeth.
Always different taps in England for cold and hot.
No matter how fast we run our hands under them,
we can never have both.

11.

Behind our breastbones,
the air from the Atlantic sweeping everything away.
Do you know me, it says.

12.

Matthew Arnold said,
I *really* believe that life is *long* —
long enough to contain everything —

13.

If seagulls are the souls of dead sailors
crying that love slows you down
no one is listening.

14.

A very serious lack of vitamin B1 causes a disease called beriberi.
In Sinhalese, beriberi means “I cannot, I cannot”,
and refers to the fact that sufferers have difficulty walking
due to nerve damage and muscle atrophy.

15.

We wonder if we have made a terrible mistake.

We can stand in Dover and wave to people in Calais.

There are seagulls warning us not to expect anything back.

16.

The Waiting Room – blue distances in the evening sunset.

It will blot out everything.

17.

We can squander it all.

They say alcohol was invented

because otherwise the Irish would conquer the world.

18.

The Phoenicians were seafarers,

they carried language around

and as a result the vowels changed.

The word *alone* started as all-one.

An inmate in a maximum-security prison in Kansas said,

*Can you imagine not being able to touch another human being
for twenty-three fucking years?*

19.

Matthew Arnold was elected
Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1857.
He was the first in his position
to deliver his lectures in English, rather than in Latin.
In 1861 he delivered three lectures titled *On Translating Homer*.
The way miners use dynamite to bleed a vein,
Arnold gives practical advice
and the lectures become backlit stained glass,
imprints from the sun.
He advises the translator to have nothing to do
with the question of whether Homer existed
and whether the poet of the *Iliad* was one or many.

20.

Agamemnon has a dream that tells him he will take Troy.
Some things cannot be faced head on.
Giddy comes from God is inside you.

21.

In his lectures, Arnold states again and again
that any translator of Homer should be imbued
with the four qualities which characterize the author:
He is eminently rapid.
He is eminently plain and direct both in his syntax and his words.
He is eminently plain and direct in the substance of his thought,
that is, in his matter and ideas.
He is eminently noble.