SAMPLER

Declare
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Geraldine Clarkson

Shearsman Books
Contents

Camelament 7
Before the Match 8
Aflatus in My Home Town 9
Leaving Glawdom by night— 11
Violette, Michaela et al, according to Mildred 13
My Mother, the Monsoon 15
When we awake 16
Declare 17
For Our Extinguished Guests 18
redress 20
UNDERLAND 21
a young woman undressed me and 22
Love Cow 23
RILT 25
EDWARDIANA 26
Brother 27
Three Young Surrealist Women… 28
In Bushy Park 29
T-E-N-G-U 30
Bus to Piura 32
His Wife in the Corner 33
The Retirement of Madame Poulay 34
Camelament

Whistle, *chica*,
whist. Give your ear
close and flutter. And flutter.
Eat in all you can hear.
Grow rotund on it, fit
as a fiddler’s wife’s
cat. There are other kinds
of right learning. Cause
you know. Cause you hear.
Bilge goes out with the suds.
A chain of Cheyennes
touches the lodge of
an enemy. You explode
flat on the floor. Fat
on fear. Flayed
with sharp and hot, and not.
Before the Match

William lets me wear her ring—
a good brother, our two hearts caudate
and sheepshanked since babyhood.

A grab of gold and emerald
I take it to bed with me and stare at it
by candlelight till the sheen lures me in

and I figure in the greeny-yellow lick
her leaf-mould eyes—her thin waist—
her black rope of hair caught

like a noose on the neck
of an errant stallion—
her bell-voice calling out to

*Billy, Billy*, for help, but he’s stepped aside
to visit with me and is saying, *Dear Sis,
things will be as they were.*

His voice, my own tones back to me,
freeses my *sang-froid*; cauterises
bobbing girl-gladness.

I put her back in the flame’s eye
twenty-one times more, murmuring. I tell him
*I had a dream* and he lifts his soft face to me.
Afflatus in My Home Town

I eat. I eat perflux and paper flying sideways in the dust. I pull soft

conversations from the bones of old men, jawing at bus stops, about horses’ form

and ale. Small girls look broken and mended wrong. I lick them over. I cannot believe

I have been mute here so long, in these grand avenues, under this low flat wind, where

everything is old—the old school, the old post office, the old library, all turned to high-end shells.

We are living like wraiths. Women fixed in flux so familiar it’s stasis, black eyes accepting

nothing, marital breath sour and agonal. We hold wrong in our fists. Wasted,

I look for food, some viaticum to get me home. Paper and perflux ingested

for no more than jesting, party-words passed round like canapés when we should scream

or else keep silence so extreme it might be counted as currency to buy us out.

Our people are eating bitter palliatives, in a bound world. And where breath should blow
in churches, it’s kept in check
in tomes, by those who treasure thrift

and handle special keys. The breath rattles
tabernacle doors, coughing between leaves

while thin lips importune us. The dead,
too, accompany us, uncomprehending

of worsted blankets which we hunch
around our ears when we are wronged,

worsted by circumstance. I can scarcely
believe I have been silent this far. Imbricated

in psychic architecture, like a snail
carrying sweet freight, bent on inching flight.

I mimic enjoyment, *jouissance*.
thrill-less sin—my ego an *outré* gent

gaunt with pleasure, opal-strung: he kisses me
slow with garlic tongue and rubbish

skill. Till I become perflux, paper shifting
and oil-stained, in alien hands.