Syncopations

SAMPLER
Also by Laressa Dickey

Bottomland
Roam
Twang
Laressa Dickey

Syncopations

Shearsman Books
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American Sonnet

Come sit beside my sad story of six hearted cowboys
who throw dirt into holes they have dug for their brothers
whose bodies walked around topped by bearskin caps
who stacked suitcases, siphoned gas from Exxon
who spoke twice from the mouth with pits for hands
who spit courtesy of Red Man, ask him if he don't
whose mothers as girls dug holes in the ground to dump failed bakings
who know when there are cows upstream
where Davy Crocket dreams only of his own teeth
which are stained and pocked by the great weed
which grew in hotbeds and cured inside other people's barns—
who called it tabbaq from those Arabs you can't stand as early as the 9th
century, & lo
for matches one must mince many firs to make Diamonds
for head and tinder shall not impede the spark
A Word In Edgewise

Here: you are
Now that’s better

I wanted the birthing, when it didn’t make no nevermind

Jealous retroactive spoon in four forked cups
Fill the spoon with gladness

Context: grain in wood, and you
swallow anyway, talk with mouth full

But is this about you fields soaked; money slim – then how not to feel sorry

You walk with too-flat feet

A too-flat sound

It’s personal Calm down

What can I say about your experience? The pearl
and its great price sliding under the bed

next to me. Looking under water for change: matches

Fair start, corpse in corn

Elm. Oleander. Crack in the sidewalk, tubers

My point is fluidity
Flow; no jabs unless it’s necessary
Plan on sleeping

I am what you have big change
toward train-track sparks

What’s the time? Should we be here now

Ask, what makes your heart race

Squall full of black birds silhouetted: trees backlit in a spray of flight

It’s right there I never said that

As if I would care

The mark of a woman
making of a table

The last time I was a character
I keep saying keep saying

When there is no place to speak, what is there

When the field floods, which way to the bargains
SAMPLER
The father’s life wound around a grandfather clock and ticked.

On a church pew or a behind a one-seater truck cab or riding on the back of flatbed over new asphalt.

Occasional bugs in the face.

A cemetery for every town, fresh flowers on military holidays.


Often that bad taste was dirt, lettuce from ground after all, so strawberry, so turnip greens. Poke salad wild next to woodpiles, especially after a field was cleared. I hated vinegar of greens but cleaned plates.


Mary a holy name, albeit simple.

A word like bastard driven by foot sole into dirt.

I bet that Aristotle person got the shit kicked out of him. Certainly if he were a woman running off at the mouth.
If this land was once covered by sea, they won’t teach that sort of past here. Pass the tobacco stalk down the line. There's rhythm they say I don’t have, and they work with it like ghosts. So what. I feel someone talking to me.

°°

wandered as fat
pigeon even I
loathing

°°

My brother, big bodied, sobbing. We were sweet and vulnerable. Our father raised Caucasian bees, which were seductive. Women flew through our skies in blue skirts. Early I took a creek path only to see red clover blooming. What could happen that they would not see? The roses belonged for years, small ropes sending them downstream. He took off his glasses, watched the old barn burn to ash. Even though I could only smell pig and salt, once I smelled cat’s milk. All these stones, fresh mint on the banks.

Tonight I’ll play fiddle and may break the strings.
What other place is sensed with dancing?

°°

My mistake, filling the curve of letters into square little boxes.
My grandmother’s body did its best to kill off girl children.

Do I know the ancestry of my teaching?

One got through.
One girl came through –

∞

Imagine how your breasts appear once and then wither, same day. This before you climb the hill with your mother. And by hill I mean the one between you and the neighbor. By creek, by country road. To look across night to bonfire, bright in his hayfield. But too there’s mean men, all men being mean, tracing circles around the fire. A ceremony around a Jesus-less cross bobbing in the fire. 1989.

Before daughter I was swept up in mimosa; he smiled
Ran races barefoot. Beat boys, girls.

Before breasts, before gabs and nodes of worthlessness, just green hills and patterns of thought going around the jaw line and closing it.

Before a man says you just need better shoes, the ordinary magic of a girl sleeping peacefully in her own bed. I shift the sheets around for her.

I saw him struggle putting his bag down

Just one crow and me, we saw him trip

∞
Mary a *holy* name.

°°

A woman running off at the mouth and he couldn’t take it. With no regard for the order numbers came in, being tied to a wall at various angles.

°°

Your own woman.

The illusion of simultaneity.

This evening in which I love. In which older mysteries, in both hands. Off the clothesline.

A buttered evening in which I wear all the luminous voices. I was a man
I shrieked.

All the trees I had to level to do this.

°°

What makes it special how one writes letters in dark to a backward self, your little keeper, running under windows with willow.
wore chambers –
porches
for hours


Or dream of filling out breasts where before only ribs
crossing repeat to cage to heart, horizon
even now phrases as drudgery.
Grease from a week’s dishes on the bottom of the sink.

Tourniquets, let me squeeze all the privates
out of this version. A door

pincher bug telling the future—

Suffering, as you say, from natural defectiveness.


A chain link dog pen around this, a peacock in the pen, named Joe.

A tree grows inside a boy and later when fruit comes he must pucker, as
if eating persimmons.
Dandy she thinks. In this infernal pressing of grey down on her person, a map of her places, see here too where her room stands on the second floor. A boy crying upstairs.

°°

Where did my body learn to rush?

There.

Someone waiting for an object. Hatchet, wrench, ratchet, chainsaw, circle saw, jigsaw, turpentine, paintbrush, shovel, rake, hoe, post hole digger, bailing twine, electric fence, barbed wire, screwdriver, hammer, drill bits, level, plunger, duct tape, caulk, pliers, vise grip, spackle, hacksaw, screws, nails, electrical tape, anchor, pry bar, square, caliper, drill, scratch awl, sledgehammer, stud finder, tin snips, tobacco stakes

If not public, I don’t exist—

°°

Sparrows about our feet someone there tossed seeds

°°

This the way I don’t feel it.

°°
From the hilltop all men, a circle of 30, distinguished sets of costumes and by circle I mean circle around a fire in a field where that fire ate a cross and by that I mean there were others too, not only white ghost uniforms but some in drabs and shaved heads, *New Nazis* they said and to the hayfield on a road on which hardly anyone drove they had come. They sang a little song called White Power. All drunk, half dancing, half limping, trying not to fall, in a circle around a fire destined to eat that Jesus-less cross.

On top of a hill, an *I*, lying very still and watching. I wore my old jeans and a Mickey Mouse sweatshirt.

A musk bend
slip slop
ascension

They didn’t want anyone to know
They wanted to announce
They kept their money in cash pressed straight in the Bible
They turned away from windows
They opened curtains
reported daily happenings: 4 bantam eggs, dead mouse

Church bells. I was waiting for someone in this house to get up.
Years later Mr. D told, when asked about that night, how his grandson sat in the dark on his own porch, shotgun across his lap, alone. How he sat listening to the chanting when suddenly (like a lark I mean to say he was 10) a voice on the loudspeaker:

DOES ANYONE HAVE A FIRE EXTINGUISHER?

°°

She the tiny snake-killing mother. Held over her head so all rattles would be included in the photograph and not bleed into grass. Her second weapon a hoe the head came right off. This is how you live in woods with small children. That man with a red beard loved The Statler Brothers. Ears red, his people from grudge bearers, standing in line.

A tiny grave grows inside a boy.

°°

The map a space where inner and outer body is one thing, like thick syrup, honey

just breath and break of space to speak

I rely on you to help me hold this, a place for speech