SAMPLER

Slant
Also by Linda Black

Inventory
Root
The Son of a Shoemaker
Linda Black

Slant

SAMPLER

Shearsman Books
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SAMPLER
She will advise her neighbour to plant aubrieta

The earth is dry & banked here & there
the sods are separate congealed with clay
She kneels cupping soil with her own bare hands
smoothes / sifts / rearranges as though she has a plan
to return to Oh how the earth ascends!
(which requires a little explanation) like rocks
above a canyon cantilevered held
as if by air alone

And here now in the background
is her neighbour emerging
from a side door How exactly will she explain
to another what she can't to herself?
Ask how she is

Say: how is it with you? expect her
       to sigh  to shift  to stir

A match (unlit)
falls to the floor it lands
       poised  between boards  with another
she prises it out

In the small of her back
       a vertebra
clicks into place  shoulders
       melt fractionally
as imperceptible
as a snowflake’s demise  She is focused
on the gladioli:
a tall / stark / rigid stem  rooted
       where it ought not  cannot  No sooner that
than the memory  of last night’s
       sudden windfall  – a wad of notes
in a pocket  – her pocket?  &
       who was it trying to take it from her?
       Sigh  all those birds  so
perfect up there  – lost
       in an avalanche
       – graphic  speedy
incomplete
       taking with it . . . 
She is elsewhere

A thought sticks
almost as soon as it has begun
& as she walks

Her coat sufficiently drab & verging
on threadbare scrapes the length
of the pavement *swish swish*

We are not in France though it could be . . .
enters a walled garden butterflies crickets
a path through a wild meadow

Yesterday she had walked
around an abandoned quarry passable
routes through rock a fireplace

Carved in a rock face the remains
of a fire rough-earth loose-earth dry-dirt
dirt where dirt should be
A lava lamp

Settles a coat (forsaken)
hangs – when she checks it
moths fly out In the hallway
a child is harnessed whose teeth
are sharp as any animals (the child
she was lay on the kitchen table)

As she rises wall responds: steady I am
in my sloping ways smoothed & primed & lofty
in my inclination & so I steady her
I through whose heights she passes pauses...
rendering (me) rending . . . a shell
a coldly tenement . . .

Meanwhile she baits moths in traps
releasing pheromones

Skip stairs
three at a time
jump ship . . .
She walks for days

Up & down stairs in & out
the washing machine has become
where she is where the moon got her
She has nowhere goes by foot
tripping over her own worse for wear
explains nothing doesn’t admit she is not
of that faith It is many years ago now
she turned & walked away no thought
from her own good someone else’s
consequence & the madman inside
where ten pinafores hang

What a clever thing she just did
she calls people she hasn’t seen for years
she is proud! When she leaves
the first time is seriously threatened
bump bump bump headfirst
on the back wheels As no one has told
& no one is so all day this thing
from out of her propped upright

A saviour in a soft jumper
or her sister’s skin she has no clear
picture apart from preferring
long fingers In that seated posture
did Keats have long fingers? a balanced
book a crossed knee but . . .
she corrects herself One hand is
one head was then retracts
too much of a put down
a Regency chair but it could be

The air comes up against her
has extremities both she covets
she covets both Under the carpet
looking out all she can see
is space She does not want a box
gathering what she incorporates
would anyone? She stays inside
hers sometimes venting

All day it puzzles her
from dwelling How exactly?
a slight small & precise
remembered from life to another
what she couldn’t herself the same words
repeated in the future very slight
changes not circles exactly

A good few years ago he told her
like a beam she imagined a searchlight
from out of the top of her head then
about the needles a pincushion
he said it must have been
unbearable So many objects
shedding light
Turn to where there is no light
check she is here She must not
run pell-mell along the side
of the hearth where the edge
meets the craved way Today
she looks to the sky thinking
to be someone else
A visitor say

Where dazed people live shy
to the bare branches shall go somewhere
back to the bare ground Could it be
this is the very same jug
or distant relative? A chair
transposed no regard for age
or time Passes quicker
Shall not notice
what her eyes see

Something flimsy
of little input not cracked up
to be really very fragile
wrapped in cellophane distanced
from the swing the wood
the unnecessary detail
Scene 1: In the hallway

—tin pink flower heads
  on green stick stalks  fifty million
  round the light switch  Above a doorway
second right  an arch revealed
whilst decorating  a recess
  not quite big enough  A fallen coat
  seeding fluff & coppers dribs
of tissue  a pocket
  reminder – soap nappies a trivial
  box of matches
  A reversible garment
  waterproofed
  on one side

Encumbered she checks tries
to make haste  to leave  to leave
behind A look . . . bemuse / behold / bewilder . . . inkling
  of an elsewhere mind  all knowledge
  erased  She  with the eyes
in the back of her head  – call it
  intuition . . . call it summons it  standing
  halfway along the hallway  that place
  of passages  facing out  no intention
  of taking  a different route  An innocent . . .
  follow her  follow  as small piles
  reassemble on each stair  fronds
  recoil  water inverts sucked up the drainpipe: the bed's
  unmaking  retractable
like a metal rule
a dragon's
intake of fire

A knowing wall  a window's
back & future  – a slice
down the middle  So many
changes of clothing  a fringe snipped so many times  there she goes . . .
with an open heart  – a figment  chewing
on liquorice comfort  Fortnightly
the insurance man calls  milkman Thursdays  savings
in the post office  green-shield stamps  – taut  like elastic
ready to fire  Forwards
to go back  to end up
wrong footed  (heels or flats?)  – a question
of where  the weight falls
hindsight
heretofore . . .

a small occasion  at the rate
a finger nail  grows  a scar
takes to fade  the skin's response
to a too hot  handle  cools
under running water  Inborn  Towards
creation . . . back & back & back  to the day  a mirror
fell from the wall  onto a rug  where
all childhood played  – but she'd gone  in that split
crescendo  to answer the call
of a neighbour:  familiarity
in the back streets
tar  in the gutter . . .

from whence she came . . .
She takes herself out of herself

Little gregarious footings
holds falls takes a-back

Who is she from? bairn-breech cairn-borne spittle & clay

The matter is nebulous the climate
untenable lock-spawn milk-spurn bile-bred flay

She gets out: crumb-path snake-slaw Betty’s café

One carves from one an other whip-spore egg-mire bird-brunt fray

Caring comes away foal-drift turn-fork brawn & bray

Goodbye split-dew flesh-core coal-mist prey

Goodbye gristle & snatch
cackle & knuckle caw caw candy