

SAMPLER

*Slant*

ALSO BY LINDA BLACK

Inventory

Root

The Son of a Shoemaker

SAMPLER

Linda Black

*Slant*

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She will advise her neighbour to plant aubrietia

The earth is dry & banked here & there  
the sods are separate congealed with clay  
She kneels cupping soil with her own bare hands  
smooths / 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 tell herself?

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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  
for 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

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## 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 coat-mist prey*

Goodbye *gristle & snatch*

cackle & knuckle *caw caw candy*