Florilegium

SAMPLER
CONTENTS

I

The Gloaming / 13
The Lightening / 14
On Heidegger’s Being and Time / 16
Elegy for Emma / 17
Light Iris, 1924 / 19
Snow Bunting / 21
Una Ursula / 22
Penny Wedding / 23
Ode to Neruda / 24
Flora and Fauna / 27
My Mother the Dishwasher / 29

II Metamorphosis

Interruption and Completion of a Thought / 33
The Artist Moved to Despair at the Grandeur of Antique Fragments / 34
Birdbook / 35
Bashō’s Prefaces to the Novels of Henry James / 36
Verse-Riddles / 38
Interludes / 39
Glasgow Haiku / 40
Some Definitions / 41
Listening to Scriabin for the First Time / 43
The Dog / 44
Colloquy with a Closed Window / 45
Sunday / 49
Danaë / 50
III

Antonyms / 53
Lot’s Wife / 55
No Hay Olvido / 56
The Gallery / 58
Lorem Ipsum / 59
La Collectionneuse / 60
Oceanic / 62
Dies Natalis / 63
Lessons on How to Understand a Famous Painting / 64
Isle of Skye / 65
Schliesse mir die Augen beide / 66
Orchid / 69
The Child Dreaming in a Poet’s House / 70
Stabat Mater / 71
Glesga Prayer / 73
The Loves of Plants / 75

GLOSSARY / 77

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / 122
To Thomas

SAMPLER
SAMPLER
Every bird that sings, and every bud that blooms, does but remind me more of that garden unseen, awaiting the hand that tills it.

—Emily Dickinson

J’ai seulement fait ici un amas de fleurs étrangères, n’y ayant fourni du mien que le filet à les lier.

I have gathered a posy of other men’s flowers, and nothing but the thread that binds them is mine own.

—Michel de Montaigne
SAMPLER
SAMPLER
THE GLOAMING

Stepping lightly, the gloaming catches in the throat; thick tufts of wheat catch lightly. The song thrush calls the day is ending. The scythe rests. Memory gleans east of the canal as father and son kneel in a field.

The alfalfa sends up their prayers as seeds in wind, in hushed succession. Brownie, the pony, watches stilly.

In a dream, he would see you in France, wounded, in a field of mustard. The dream came thrice as a shutter on the heart. He did not know it was your footing; a plea for the lead to miss any poor soul. An oath between man and his God levels the field.

He knows you by your name. He sees the work, and deems it fine. The strands of wheat on the whetstone are as the down of a babe— the same hands work both with equal discernment. You now dream of the redburrant bush —how you split it like the rood in pieces across the yard, little garnets come spring, and mother in her apron pleased —that we are more than the sum of our parts. Body grafted to spirit and you—to Margaret.
THE LIGHTENING

The place where the mind goes—
in grief, I am led invisibly
to summers in Meadow Vista,

minnows clustered on the lake—
Margaret takes my hand
to the blackberry bush.

In childish instancy, I do not see
the thorns, only
deep garnets. We climb a ladder
to the highest bramble. We sneak
several in our mouths. And later—
jam with the same hand.

What urgency is God’s work
(who will plant the daffodils
next spring?)

—the burgundy petals of each
dahlia catch the light, the sum
of these days

is reticent. Flower heads nod
soundless in the wind
the birds song soundless—

Margaret, with whom I share
a name, I have
engraved you on the palms
of my hands—with blackberry juice
— with needle and thread
— with child.

Now, what is left but quiet presence
in time,
the leaf turns, a deer
crosses the blue-oak forest, like light
you can step in
and out of.
ON HEIDEGGER’S *BEING AND TIME*

I
When I was fourteen, I wanted to play the violin. I did not have the discipline of my twin, her feet dragging before her eyes down each stair early before seminary each morning. My Mom would accompany her on the piano, a remnant from girlhood that came before books and boys. Vanessa would play while she thought, and Mom thought I slept upstairs. I was listening: a book by my bedside and my black lab asleep with me in my twin bed.

*Now*, I would hear Mother say. It is time, *now* is the time. Everyone is waiting for you. Your siblings are waiting for you in the car. God is waiting for you, too.

II
The metronome tsks time. It is the telling of the *now, now, now, now*. It is the quiet from the before, the clamor of what is to come, four equally stressed sixteenths. The details deliberate, the need for discipline in the disparate. The phrasing of it all, time being robbed from one note to another. There is refuge in order. The absoluteness of a thing holding time, holding time in time. It is pointing to *now, no, now*, though the tick-tick sound has come and gone before it has come.

III
Listen: one can only wait for nothing and nothing waits for no one. I know nothing and know no end.
ELEGY FOR EMMA

I
Today I pass the time plucking oranges from your tree, dropping them one by one into a trash bin with a hole in the bottom.

I walk through your house breathing the bitter scent of it and leave its letters falling into a bowl on your table.

It feels like a dream: the skin of the fruit in my hand, the slivers of half-moons taking shape in my mouth and still (so late in the season) there is fruit on the trees.

II
I stand in the silence of your kitchen, the cupboards empty, their contents growing tired in a brown box: olive green plates from your wedding,
a rusted silver spoon,
derby cups from 1951,
a wine glass,
and a clock
without the time.

You didn’t drink
I say to no one.
And I didn’t know you liked horses.

A painting of some Bolshevik village
rests clumsily off its hook
next to a photo of a nameless couple.
I ask mom who that woman is.
She says your grandmother.
It is her wedding day
and even in the black and white,
in the shadows of her lace collar,
the folds of her dress, in the creases
of her darkly lined eyes and lips,
her face drifts
to the surface
a budding lily.
LIGHT IRIS, 1924

Georgia O’Keeffe, water colour

I
Your slender limbs grow,
only when planted. Your slender limbs,
growing.

I want to grow
with you, to entwine
with your roots

in dark unfurling
over
and over me.

II
When I want
to be myself,
I hide; put my hands

in pockets
or learn to love
my body softly, sometimes

touching,
imposing on everything
and nothing.

III
I want to feel skin.
I want to feel the skin
of skin. I branch my fingers,
spread them thin, nesting in the small of your back. I want to nest. In you,

I am planted; your petal, your pollen, I would like to be.

IV
I feel the weight of hands carrying a plant that never blooms.
SNOW BUNTING

When I plucked you from your aerie
that was leave in the wind.
Someone must have entered
an empty room.

The walls spit feathers.
We did not reach the long
and low sleep of martyrs.

Since despair is my forsaker,
and you my keeper, I confess
(mea maxima culpa). For your part

in this sorry slip of hearts,
you should sit on Càrn Dearg alone.
For mine, I will keep company with excess

out on the bird-shore:
our rapine bodies sore
in their longings.

The grey day's aria hums through our wrinkled bones.