

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW IF I SAY YES

I've never understood my favorite friend very well.
We're like oblique rhymes. Then she leaves at will,
returns unexpected, often more than once a day.
She's so selfless, sometimes I turn and do
a double take to make sure it really is she.

Her voice is alto soft; you called her shy.
She's the one to marry, she's the one
who doesn't have to win
or even compete. She'd be satisfied
with a bungalow, an economy car, ordinary food.

This place can get crowded; I didn't see
my other friend come in just now. I say
"friend" only because she's always so close--
all through school in the same class,
so many nights in the same bed.

Fantasizing about some boy she wanted bad,
she never spared details. Her imagery would wheel
through my mind, center in my lower half and while
I lay thinking how a slow hot cure would feel
against my aching, she'd begin to fill

her mental shopping cart with perks and goods
her favors could harvest-- as if the gods
designed her just to be rewarded for her beauty.
I'd call her nasty names and say her body
was not meant to be used that way.

I'd make her promise to behave, then we
wouldn't speak for several days and nights.
She'd wait till I was maybe studying, stomach in knots,
then talk about mink coats or yachts; she wanted it all.
Next day I'd hear her laughing as I rode the el,

struggling with a thesis and a nine pound book,
her "degrees won't get it for you, babe," hung in the back
of my head. So of course you've also met her,
the cunning one tossing her trailing scented hair,
looking lies from under lashes long enough

to blow in the wind, her voice sometimes a knife
out of its sheath. You've seen her eyes, wild
craving as a hawk's, cool fire like a cougar's, willed
to the art of pursuit, always weighing, always hiding
something. And you've fallen in their orbit, unheeding.

But watch. The lids lower and raise and she's gone.
Here sits a middling woman with nothing to gain
by telling you this. I wonder why I did.
Yet you must have noticed when daisies died
and orchids appeared on a dandelion stem.

You've seen fawn eyes offer praise, trust, then steam
with sudden rage or desire before making the switch
to layers of velvet empathy, an unfurled swatch
of understanding, reflex lenses of kindness. Right now
two personas are past tense. How long I never know.

I share these eyes with her and her. I've confessed
the complexities of a woman. A blink. That fast.
The change can happen with a syllable, a color,
or slowly like the soreness from a chafing collar.
Part of this trihedroness should be kept

in garden sun; part needs to be tightly capped
like fulminate of mercury, never stirred.
The less definite one needs to be steered
with a modicum of persuasion, a steady hand.
And one hand should be mine, my conscience hound,

or just the basic elements of humanhood.
Are we so different after all? If you had
a psychic scalpel would you sever
all your selves, or keep them in the brew for savor?
Flavor may flourish more with more than one receiver.