



from the mind of Dr. L. Arnott

CLUTTER

in repose

have you ever wondered
what fairies dream of when
stars spill into the liquid sky?
moss-drunk, and nested in lichen-blankets
woven snug by caress of fungal lace,
do their bones still glow
under the weight of slumber?

answered by phosphor sheen curled
in the atlas blue blink of dew
below ancient sleeping bark
where root-thought drifts as breath
and spores rise like dust motes

do they remember flight in repose?
chalky wings on the cusp of tremble
though not to stir,
not even when the soil sighs

will they dream of us?
in places where silver threads hang
from the edge of the world,
and pull us down
where nothing is but tender

all that is known, too late

bloodsong

they turned their backs and pretended not to weep,
fragment of finger and cracked tooth,
broken straps of ceremonial slippers

She bound them together with her own hair.

i watched from my window as
the wastes stretched endless and crimson

She did not stumble.

and the ribbons she wore
some say they were veins,
pulled from her own arms and set loose in the wind
o did they sing
like teeth cut on glass.

the Beast... o the Beast
it was not flesh,
but a great veil of tendrilled matter,
all who looked upon it forgot why they came,
a question none could answer.

She stood before the Beast and did not shrink.
unfastened the bones from her back,
held them in her hands like blades.
the foe hissed - coiling to unmake her.

bitten through tongue,
spat blood into sand.
then for the first time,
She spoke.
bones ignited.

some say She struck it with her sister's spine
others, that She climbed into the Beast's chest
and abides there still,
to don its form like laurels.

oft-times, when the red dust swirls thick,
i see ribbons dance in the wind
set loose, chorus without end

grief, again

i used to think
grief was an ache
that arrives unbidden
but maybe
it is not only presence
but absence for

the sill of my soul
where they once rested
in sunbeams
now gathers dust
and all the love
i still carry

such love is
so intangibly vast,
so acute,
it renders their nonbeing
truly

unbearable.

yet i wonder
how it's possible to hold
something
so heavy—
lacking mass,
no edges
or substance.

how can it be
that they lie
beneath the earth,
beyond every river
and i remain
here
without

the scent and brush
of a soft pink nose;
the stretch of paws,
a curious spirit.

i am without
you.
and I will
never
be the same.

then
i realise
ah!
this is it:
the reason i ever was,
and all i will be:
the truth
that there will never be
another love
quite like
You.

fish man

When I was young, there was a fisherman who sold fresh fish straight from the shore who we called the Fish Man. He would park his van outside my neighbour's house on the drive, and regular customers would come to pick from what he had caught that week.

Often, I would accompany my dad next door, and he let me choose our dinner. I would peer into the back of the van at the silver glint of sea bass and mackerel, piled on ice like treasure, and point out what I wanted with a hesitant finger. My dad would proceed to stand there and talk to Fish Man, man to fisherman, while I waited, hopping from foot to foot.

I was adorable enough to draw attention, and so when the Fish Man finally greeted me, I gave him a shy smile, while my dad launched into a proud account of my latest endeavours - as if they were his own. As he drew Fish Man's attention, I nodded and lifted the corners of my mouth at all the right moments.

The talking could go on for more than an hour. I would shift my weight and kick at the gravel. All the while, I stared into the van at the dead, glossy eyes of the fish and thought how easily I might have been one of them.

bellowing drownt

The first time she screamed underwater, it caught in her throat; kelp snagged on a hook. She had lost air before the surface vanished - and still, she lived. Not floated. Not drifted - really lived. Her eyes adjusted to the gloaming, her limbs drawn by gravity made tender.

He found her where waves broke - and so did she. His cold embrace scalded as she stepped into warmer waters.

She couldn't speak to him there. But beneath the surface, his chest pulsed - vibrated. A low note thrummed through his sternum, as her voice entered his body.

In time, she taught him sounds and speech carved by pressure and pitch. Language made from longing, lull, and the low soul-ache of the ocean. When she mimicked the first syllable, he shuddered with recognition. And so they spoke.

brook keep her

In the crook of root
channel bent hard,

heads were torn from slender stems

Daisies. Violets.

Queen Anne's lace, still wet with dew.

She drifted down,
as though she'd paused to listen.

Her own reflection called to her for weeks,
through culvert stones and reeds of cattail hush

It sang beneath the bridge,
voice like God's breath.

Current caught her like a cradle,
warmed her wrists with water's psalm,

and threaded petals
from hair to silver rib.

Her dress, lung-swollen
minnows against skin,
as if they knew.

and farther still, where silt lies thick,
She will rise.

Last Testimony

The myth of female frailty is staggering. O ye of trembling mind, hear these words: Woman, thou art kindled with a fire far fiercer than the stars themselves - though it be compressed between the hands of custom, denser than gas and dust. Verily, O woman, thou art bound; yoked in silence, shackled by sermons, taught to bare teeth without menace, to nurse without need, to smile when struck. Ne'er to cede care but always to yield; to display beauty in permanence, even bleed prettily, as if thy pain were part of thy dowry.

Be composed, they say. Be gracious. Give, but never ask. Speak only when spoken to, and then in dulcet tones. Stand tall, do not stumble. Succeed - quietly, endlessly. Swallow thy fear, thy grief. Stay in thy place.

And so it is learned, sister, as the midwife teaches the girl-child and the priest teaches the pew, to fold fury like scalding cloth into smaller shapes and fit it beneath the ribs like a second heart - a black bile-stirred organ, pulsing with melancholia, beating with the slow thrum of survival. Such rage ferments, entombed in the body, its heat rising like vapours, curdling the blood, straining nerves until they quiver - a spectral fever threatening to rend sinew from soul. It winds through viscera, binding heart, gut, and breath, a charm of fury worn beneath the bodice.

The world, in its long tyranny, has shaped our temper into monstrous forms. They render it unnatural, unsexed, a blemish on sweet, virtuous, delicate, desired femininity. For what man may kneel before the altar of a woman aflame? When we raise our voices, they echo back to us not as truth but as shrillness. When we assert, they deem us haughty. When we weep, we are weak; when we do not, we are cruel. If we burn, we are mad. If we refuse to burn, we are frigid. Emotion, rebranded, reviled - ruinous of all things.

The Crown, the Husband, the Church - they deny us possession of it, our indignation in its full majesty. It is stolen from us - fetishised, pathologised, demonised. We are the curser and the cursed, the midwives and poisoners, the furies and sibyls, vengeful witches drowned for daring to sermonise, to theologise, to speak of the Divine as though She were kin. That he - man, state, or pulpit - has so often delighted in branding women as witches, and in framing their resistance, wisdom, or nonconformity as collusion with the Wicked, is consonant with his native fear: that no evil is to be done in the kingdom of mankind without the permission of man.

Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live, he scrawls, and thus hangs a thousand daughters. So Odious and Abominable is the name of Witch, yet the so-called infallible Proofs of Guilt in such as are accused with that Crime are little more than

spectral lies - pitiful scaffolds of man's own invention, upon which the autonomy of woman is denounced and hanged.

Exhibit A: her barren womb. Exhibit B: her tongue unbridled. Exhibit C: her refusal to kneel.

I ask thee, sister, what becomes of the soul who carries such weight embodied, but borne in flight? We rise, yes, but what does it mean to rise when every wing is broken in the cradle, and every gust of wind is heralded rebellion? Across a lifetime, how does the toil of survival warp the spine? What is the cost, sister, of hauling with us: the ungrieved dead, the unlived lives, the unborn wrath of those who came before?

Once, I would have questioned this in abstraction, mere riddles to the Sphinx. But the inflammation of oppression has coalesced into rotting wounds. No - by hemlock and salt, I swear fealty to such realities I will not neglect. For in the house of mine own lord, they shall uncover my remains beneath floorboards warped by winter's chill - limbs contorted by dereliction, as witches left for ash. Let their pious hands tremble as they lift the planks, and let the sermon fall silent. Let them stare. Let them weep. Fear is woven from the narratives we bind ourselves to in life, but in death, it is rewritten.

We are authors of every woman that has ever existed. We have died, we are dying, we shall die again, and still, hell itself shall not hold the measure of our fury. The Devil's

mark is not upon us, sister - it is upon them, and they will know it.

Before that hour comes, take this testimony, scrawled in blood and bone, for it is thine to bear forward. Not as warning, nor as lament, but as reckoning. For rage is our birthright, the fuel within the very marrow of our bones. In the abounding darkness, struck by the very first star, may thou deliver these words of Truth as scripture, as spell, as final curse - to those whom thou shall return unto the Divine.

in lieu of faith

I love from the outside in,
as a pilgrim bends at the gate
towards the very heart of mine
that carries yours
vessel encased in fears still yet to master.

You are no myth.
Your form in flesh sacrament made visible.
Altar as body, worship as thought,
I kneel to commune,
to taste the host of your mind,
and drink the mystery of your blood
like wine long forbidden
to the mouths of unworthy parish.

They taught us love
as commandment,
and martyrdom.
But what we have is no gospel.
No saints have felt
the exaltation of such surrender,
No psalm to divulge the liturgy we speak.

I have grieved the idols
I once knew as myself.
Bathed in cold fonts,
lips to confession
I laboured not for grace but
You—
not salvation, but presence.
Not doctrine,
but full-bodied devotion.

I choose again
this sanctuary of you.
This love of ours
no Heaven could explain.

why must you make yourself intelligible
through suffering?

unmake it all

let becoming be refusal.

her home

i hear my grandmother's voice
when I see the colour blue.

a lilting Gaelic warmth
that seems at odds with its cool surface

i hear my grandmother's voice
though world's apart,
it unfurls as the Highland mist
seeping gently into earthen pores

i hear my grandmother's voice
among the spitters of morning,
the conference of fauna
a soothing northwestern gale

i hear my grandmother's voice
passing by the fallow burn
where cerulean irises gaze back.
she asks me where I'm going

and as I reply
i hear my grandmother's voice:
all the way north
aye, I'll wait, hen

i find her
within peat-smoke curling,
the call of gulls,
between land and cobalt waves.

CLUTTER