



This is one-fifth of a larger collection of conversation-like poems, collected under the name DAVE; the other four are ALDA, BETTY, BUSTER, and ISABELLE. They were originally commissioned by Public Fiction for *A Public Fiction*, an exhibition at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, in the summer of 2014. On that occasion, NELL was performed by artists Stanya Kahn and Becket Flannery, reading from a “table” set within the show.

Cover: Wanda Pimentel, *Serie Envolvimento (Involvement Series)*, 1968, vinyl paint on canvas, 46 × 35 in., photo by Marco Terranova, Collection Gilberto Chateaubriand, MAM-RJ, Rio de Janeiro

old words make me sad

like what

carhop

I've never said *carhop* in my life

cardigan

my aunt wore cardigans my Aunt Nell

was she sad

she always showed up at our house at dusk with her mysterious yellow luggage and sat on the couch

why

you mean why on the couch

yes

so she could teach me the sleeper hold

show me how to do it

she also taught me the word *confidential* when I see the word *confidential* even now a whole Humphrey Bogart movie comes out around it

wasn't that a magazine

just put your lips together and blow

what happened to Nell

all of a sudden she wasn't around any more maybe she died it got all hush hush you know how they whisper together in the kitchen and stop when

you come in

aunts have a longitude

no one ever said

a solitude

yes

unlike uncles

uncles I remember always grouped around the stove on winter nights
passing the whiskey watching the fire

storytellers were they

actually no mostly silent big silent men side by side sort of rustling

I wonder are we better off with all our talk

and I remember that icy path from the kitchen to the outhouse no one
on it snow on it mother-of-God spotless in the moonlight

show me the sleeper hold

I can't

ah

she never got around to it

ah

no one knew how to ask each other anything

you often mention the outhouse why is that

some Freudian thing you're implying

not implying anything I merely wonder why you always mention
the outhouse was it a two-seater

ours was a two-seater yes

so you could sit and shit alongside somebody else

theoretically

and did you

I went there to read

I can just see you heading down the path with a volume of Proust
under each arm

those were happy days

you crazy fuck don't look so sad

I'm going to ask Dave

ask Dave about the outhouse

no the sleeper hold he's a medical man he may know it

do you keep a journal

yes

why

different reasons

Dave says that guy kept a journal

I don't want to talk about this

Dave says they're using a few pages of it in the documentary

not interested

he says things like *I was trained to do what I do in accordance with my training*

tautology

no it isn't

going swimming see you later

say hi to Dave

shot of whiskey for the boy not much else ever said

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