

**RECOLLECTING: RAW
2013**

NAOMI BARBER



Pierre Mornet
New York Times
Sunday Book Review
December 27, 2012

*You never know what's worse
With the angry ones,
Watching them live,
Or watching them die
Jami Attenberg, *The Middlesteins**

But love that comes too late,
Like a remorseful pardon slowly carried,
To the great sender turns a sour offence.

- All's Well That Ends Well William Shakespeare Act V, scene 3, line 5.

.....
• "This is the very ecstasy of love
Whose violent property foredoes itself,
And leads the will to desperate undertakings.

- Hamlet, William Shakespeare Act II, scene 1, line 102.

.....

A book must be an ice ax to break the sea frozen inside us. Franz Kafka

.....
You cannot tell how soon it may be too late. Mathew Brady Photographer (1823-96)

.....
Jesus has a very special love for you. As for me the silence and the emptiness is so great that I look and do not see, listen and do not hear.

Mother Theresa, Come Be My Light

.....
I learned not to show you're tired or weak or upset.

Thea Alvin, Stone Mason (NY Times, July 18, 2013)

.....
"Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate."
C.G JUNG

.....
There's no coming to consciousness without pain. – CG jung

.....
We are meant to be hungry, Big Brother, Lionel Shriver

.....
Recent psychological theories posit that suicide is driven by intense mental pain: hopelessness, a yearning for escape, a sense of not belong, feelings of burdensomeness –

Mathew K. Nock, Harvard Psychologist winner of MacArthur Genius Grant

.....
un-burdensomeness makes sense...nb

.....
The trick is to see the world as a glass already shattered, freeing yourself from a life exhausted in dread of the moment of breaking –

Buddhist belief – With or Without You by Domenica Ruta

Dear brothers & sisters, is your life full of difficulties and temptations? Then be happy, for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. So let it grow, and don't try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, then you will be ready for anything; strong in character, full and complete.

- James 1:2-4

In the late 1960's while living in Atlanta with a second husband (the unmentionable, she called him)...Michelle Stuart, Artist

*Husband number one and his **satyriasis: excessive or abnormal sexual craving in the male** – it was never about love, now I have a word for it –two days on and one day off...*

...as complex as it is simple, is that the unendurable can and will be endured only if one chooses to go on...

The Why of Things, Elizabeth Hartley Winthrop

**If I Don't Ask I Won't Get*

**Keeping a Diary Support Personal Development*

**Be More Flexible*

**It's Pretty Much Impossible to Please Everyone*

**Now is Better*

**Feel Others Feel*

Six Things: Sagmeister & Walsh

Jew Museum Installation

Your life doesn't have to be played out against your past.

James McGreevey Ex-Governor of New Jersey –

painful unpleasure (s) Freud

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In search of a quiet disappearing
I write I am a writer
I am a verb
NB

.....
wrapping himself in a cocoon of the familiar – nb
.....

What happens when you get to the age of 60 is that you have no more doubts. I know why I'm here on this planet. I know what I need to do. I know what is a distraction and what is not. John Zorn, Composer and Saxophonist

The Unknowns

I see myself as a life-support system for feelings of anxiety. The anxiety is the organism, and I'm the habitat.

state of being as stretched across the gulf between my life's twin goals: experiencing uncompromised happiness and not being a loser.

Gabriel Roth

...
owen,
relishes words
new words
slide his mouth delicious fruit
nb

Well at least she beat old age. Woody Allen

as he grows older the forces of obsession and mortality collide – James Turrell

New York is actually more of a verb than a noun, Jonathan Hollingsworth, photographer said, because it's engaged in an endless evolution of building, tearing down and rebuilding. Before Rawhide was a bar, it was a candy store. In a few dozen coats of paint, it will probably be a bar again. The great and terrible fact of this city is that as soon as you fall in love with something here, it breaks your heart by becoming something else.

Socrates did not fear death; he calmly drank the hemlock. Kierkegaard was obsessed with death, which made him a bit gloomy....NY Times June 17, 2013

Are you scared? Woody Allen asked friend Mickey Rose as he neared death

*Inescapable meaning of death...no more maleds –
said Mickey Rose, writer with Woody Allen*

.....

*...because the past for sure is unchangeable...better to die than to live as a bored
person...Shimon Peres, 90th birthday – speaking about retiring*

.....

*I think you can't change the past but you can change how you look at it how you
understand it...naomi barber*

.....

*Listen to people in their 80's. They have looked across the street at death for a decade.
Scott Simon, Weekend Edition Saturday NPR*

What Will Die?

what will die with me everything nothing
what will they remember everything nothing
nothing of me everything of them
who will take the time to recall
when I am nothing left nothing at all?
nb

.....

Found Child

There is a furnace a fury
in that boy
I'll fuck you up
I'll mess with your head
I know how
There is a furnace a fury
Inside him
In essence
I am afraid
Of the boy I found
The baby I took in
And of whom
I now am so leery
So very afraid
NB

.....

My son and I
We are
An off-balance symmetry
NB

More than can be hoped for: *Mother died today. Or, maybe, yesterday; I can't be sure.*
Albert Camus, The Stranger

"Everyone wants to be alone in someone else's heart, one character says. In the end, I am alone in mine."
A Guide to Being Born by Ramona Ausubel

I thought how the two of us were alone in this room and in this house, Antonia reflects, but alone with a shared solitude, each of us alone with our own pain deep in our flesh but mitigating it at the same time by the strange arts of nakedness.
The Sound of Things Falling – Juan Gabriel Vasquez

Lesbian Death Bed

lesbian death bed – coined by Pepper Schwartz –

*I suffered from older woman younger man deathbed
Not getting a face lift the kind with the slice
Right by the ear that van gogh cut
I was forty-one
He was thirty-three
He believed he deserved more better
For all of his favors
He was a pig
Deathbed crept in on cat's paws
Should have roared
Clawed his eyes out
Like Oedipus poking his mother's eyes out
In reverse should have blinded him
He pitted me against his mother
Blinded by love for him*

*Put on pedestal
Built of dried pasta curlicues*

*Laughed, she said you look like my mother
When clothier referred to me
Mom, do you like the look
He mocked he jeered
Harris Tweed professorial
Should have disgusted me
Should have knocked his sight out
Before he blindsided me*

*Debris of past regret
He walks and fucks still
While I am nearer death
Old age solitary single
Death no lover
Body numbs starts down on toes
Mother age sage said
In dying days
And then
Death rattle
Life succumbs
NB*

News of yet another death, that of a former friend and business backer from Sabbath's days in New York, precipitates his decision to leave Roseanna and drive to the city for the funeral, then arrange for his own death. ("He had to see what it looked like before he did it himself.") Through flashback and fantasy, in a narrative that moves, as its emotional temperature dictates, from third-person comic or dispassionate to extremes of first-person clowning and perverse confession, we are treated to the full range of Sabbath's theater, "where the atmosphere was insinuatingly anti-moral, vaguely menacing, and at the same time, rascally fun."

As An Antidote: Sabbath's Theater by Philip Roth

*"They made love simply, straightforwardly – she saw the ceiling, he the sheets."
All That Is by James Salter*

Couldn't (life) it be seen as a miracle of cool rivers and vast forests, whorled snail shells and deep potholes, veins and gray matter, deserted planets and expanding galaxies? Because meaning is not something we are given, but which we give. Death makes life meaningless because everything we have ever striven for ceases when life does, and it

*makes life meaningful, too, because its presence makes the little we have of it
indispensable, every moment precious.*
My Struggle, Book 2: A Man in Love by Karl Ove Knausgaard

cracking me free...love, light, strength (and glue) she said, cracked me free...
Sarah Kishpaugh NY Times May 5, 2013

***luca's illness cracked me free –
death's breath love's death -nb***

Repair Disrepair Disappear

*What is left of me?
The day after
I granted myself
Permission
To leave go end it
Fifteen years after
He my father died
Unmooring my heart
Freed from the promise
To myself
What is left of me?
Heart tissue breath
Memories mind
And still niggling
Sunrises
Loving still being alive*

NB

Every third thought shall be my grave. Prospero, Tempest Shakespeare

*"THE boardwalk was gone. Goodbye, boardwalk. The ocean had finally carried it away.
The Atlantic is a powerful ocean. Death is a terrible thing. That's a doctor I never heard
of. Remarkable. Yes, that's the word for it. It was all remarkable. Goodbye, remarkable.
Egypt and Greece goodbye, and goodbye, Rome!"*

Sabbaths Theater Philip Roth

.....
I hope it doesn't sound silly to say that for me there is a connection between the task of piano playing, trying to find the elusive combination of nuances that bring the phrase alive, and the search for the 'perfect' combination of words to express something."
Jeremy Denk concert pianist and author New Yorker article, "Every Good Boy Does Fine"
.....

We'll always have Paris. Humphrey Bogart, Casablanca
.....

Absent, always. It all happened without me. Endgame, Samuel Beckett
.....

*all sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them –
isak dinesen*

.....
*the unhappiest man – Kierkegaard – (someone incapable of living in the present,
dwelling instead in past memory or future hope.)*
.....

alive in the mind of another...stephen grosz psychoanalyst
.....

An honorable human relationship – that is, one in which two people have the right to use the word "love" – is a process, delicate, violent, often terrifying to both persons involved, a process of refining the truths they can tell each other.

*It is important to do this because it breaks down human self-delusion and isolation.
It is important to do this because in doing so we do justice to our own complexity.
It is important to do this because we can count on so few people to go that hard way with us.*

Adrienne Rich
.....

Already Etched Out

already etched out
x'd out
eliminated
removed
rubbed out
still my breath
clears foggy windows
if sputtering
hurling gobs of goo
coughing nonsensically
annoyingly
i'm moving on
looking for an exit strategy
least muss least fuss
least chance of failing
not to be
a pseudo suicide
roth, sabbath's theater
oye
no not me
you already
got rid of me
your need of
and for me
got the message
not to impinge
stare down the clock
when to begin
to begin the end

nb

In my beginning is my end.

East Coker, T.S. Eliot

Whoever I Was

In my beginning
Death beats to womb
Tom-tom thrumming
Hard slaps
Desperate slugs
Pounding and pounding
Thick skin
Womb rounds out
Extends
And so I begin

First time I ever saw
Her beat herself
Said my father
Was the day
She found out she was pregnant
Married three months
Knew her husband
For not much longer
In my beginning
Beaten within
An inch of my life

Here I am at my end
Never a moment
When I didn't feel
That tom-tom beat
Cowering
Afraid
Unwelcomed
From the start
Held at arms length
Brittle cracked lips kiss

Time has come
For dying to begin
Sad just
Damn sad
Never ever
Trusted
Another
Continued
To be
Stuck
Longing

Fleeing
Death to birth
Chase by
Rabid maniac mother
Fist to head
Self-to-self rumbles
Tom-tom beat
Thrumming
Smothered
With her self-hatred
At birth
Never to recover
Gasped alive
Breathing whimpering
Heart beating
Infant cries
In an instant
First breaths drawn
Knew
Possibility
For love
Forever
And all time
To be denied

Prophecy
At first moments
Lasted
A lifetime

NB

*I wait for catastrophes.
Expertise is the enemy of imagination.
I avoid expertise like the plague.*

Still, as we mature into our mortality, we begin to gingerly dip our horror-tingling toes into the void, hoping that our mind will somehow ease itself into dying, that God or some other soothing opiate will remain available as we venture into the darkness of non-being.

Her indelible absence is now an organ in our bodies, whose sole function is a continuous secretion of sorrow.

The Aquarium

Aleksandar Hemon NY Times 3/21/13

.....

Circumcised women are less apt to make nuisances of themselves than intact ones. "what is the case if her husband died or divorced her, is she going to pull men from the cares?"

"being a man is a privilege, but it's also a terrific pressure,"

"Whatever the reason, the upshot is men with their tackle in a twist."

Sex and the Citadel – Intimate Life in a Changing Arab World by Shereen El Feki, NY Times book

Review 4/8/13

.....

When death leans over to sniff you, when massive unmetaphorical pain goes crawling through your bones, when fear...god-damn fear, you can't get rid of it...ices your spine.

So long as your ambition is to stamp your existence on existence, your nature on nature, then your ambition is corrupt, and you are pursuing a ghost.

My Bright Abyss by Christian Wiman

.....

I am against religion because it teaches us to be satisfied with not understanding the world.

Richard Dawkins

.....

If there is anyone known to you who might benefit from a letter or a visit, do not on any account postpone the writing or the making of it. The difference made will almost certainly be more than you have calculated.

Christopher Hitchens

.....

If I keep a green bough in my heart the singing bird will come. Chinese proverb

*There are lovers content with longing.
I'm not one of them.*

Rumi

Who ever I was

I am not

NB

Next time, don't hook up marry someone not to love...
Like mother like son and daughter...

NB

Drubbed out of their lives

Hegemonic momma

Wife daring to erase

Eliminate even a fig of his old life

Form of torture

No memories no touchstones no amulets

No reveries no relatives

The past

Flung in the dung heap of the past

NB

*"I wash your ankles
with my Tears. unhem
my sweep of hair*

*and burnish the arch of your foot
Still your voice cracks
above me*

*I cut off my hair and toss it across your pillow.
A dark towel
like the one after sex.
I'm walking out,
my face a dustpan,
my body stiff as a new broom.*

*I will drive boys
to smash empty bottles on their brows.
I will pull them right out of their skins.
It is the old way that girls
get even with their fathers-
by wrecking their bodies on other men"*

"Mary Magdalene" by Louise Erdrich

.....



.....

Bullied Sullied

Bullied sullied
Escape valve
Escape narrative
Did I really have to go?
Get a divorce
Sullyng time

Children's lives
Was murdering us/me
Really in the cards
Never stayed to find out
Escape artist
Then and now
Death the last exit
Time will tell
How I enter it
Quicksilver
Or straight forward
Leaving a final time
Taking my life
As it ebbs
Courageous
Or Cowardice?

NB

*Immensity of isolation, horrifying isolation
Best preparation for death – Philip Roth, Sabbath's Theater*

The Trees

*Wave but, except to say "wind-
Up again," this
Means nothing. Sometimes,*

*We hold on to a life tightly.
Foolish; sad.*

Not to know that it has already left us.

Carl Phillips, Poet, From the Devotions, 1998

Mountain Dreamer from The Invitation

*It doesn't interest me what you do for a living
I want to know what you ache for
and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing.*

*It doesn't interest me how old you are
I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool*

*for love
for your dreams
for the adventure of being alive.*

*It doesn't interest me what planets are squaring your moon...
I want to know if you have touched the center of your own sorrow
if you have been opened by life's betrayals
or have become shriveled and closed
from fear of further pain.*

*I want to know if you can sit with pain
mine or your own
without moving to hide it
or fade it
or fix it.*

*I want to know if you can be with joy
mine or your own
if you can dance with wildness
and let the ecstasy fill you to the tips of your
fingers and toes
without cautioning us to
be careful
be realistic
to remember the limitations of being human.*

*It doesn't interest me if the story you are telling me
is true.
I want to know if you can
disappoint another
to be true to yourself.
If you can bear the accusation of betrayal
and not betray your own soul.
If you can be faithless
and therefore trustworthy.
I want to know if you can see Beauty
even when it is not pretty
every day.
And if you can source your own life
from its presence.*

*I want to know if you can live with failure
yours and mine
and still stand on the edge of the lake
and shout to the silver of the full moon,
"Yes."*

*It doesn't interest me
to know where you live or how much money you have.
I want to know if you can get up
after a night of grief and despair
weary and bruised to the bone
and do what needs to be done
to feed the children.*

*It doesn't interest me who you know
or how you came to be here.
I want to know if you will stand
in the center of the fire
with me
and not shrink back.*

*It doesn't interest me where or what or with whom
you have studied.
I want to know what sustains you
from the inside
when all else falls away.
I want to know if you can be alone
with yourself
and if you truly like the company you keep
in the empty moments.*

Oriah, Mountain Dreamer from The Invitation

.....

How to Make a Home

*If you have belongings, personal effects, unpack them, but do not put them away in
drawers or cabinets or closets with any immediacy. Let them sit out for an hour, a few
days, so they can greet you when you enter a room and you can catch sight of that
sweater your grandmother knit and you can relax. – stand naked in as many rooms
as you can – for the asylum seeker, unmitigated freedom is not instinctual.*

The Walking by Laleh Kadivi

.....

How to relinquish health and hope; how to surrender assets to thieving relatives and one's children to America. Slough off your wealth, like an animal molting in the autumn. Look up the pretty girls of your youth. Find someone to play cards with – Have an exit strategy. How to get filthy rich in rising Asia

by Moshin Hamid

.....

Today I'll Sit Still

***Today I'll sit still.
When my dog shuffles over and offers me
his fleas and his soul, I'll turn away.
To everything I'll close my eyes,
slice the darkness and eat it.
I'll refuse to give money on a platter
or a wet kiss under the moon.
Today I'll just sit
and say No to everyone and everything.
To the book on my desk, it's sad tale
of abandonment, remorse and death;
I'll keep it on the tip of my tongue
like a lukewarm dime.
No to the daily mail with its greasy fingers,
no to the telephone and its humming
through the carcass of a sparrow,
no to every projection of the self.
No to me, this preposterous accident
who speaks of the "self."
Today I'll be anti-social.
Today I'll grow into myself, be the river
of my blood, the sky inside my eyes,
the maze of my ribs, the dust that settles
on my heart. I'll let my bones sink
like pebbles in a pond.
I'll let my feet grow roots and be an extra zero
on the checks that I'll refuse to write.***

Ernesto Trejo

.....

***Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,***

*Our peace in His will
And even among these rocks*

Ash Wednesday TS Eliot

Honey, we are dipping our toes in the River Styx
Mine belong yours don't

NB

EXITING IN PLAIN SIGHT

Is it because
I am afraid
That I want to die
That I want out
Because I don't
Want to face
What I am not yet
Enough of me gone
I can anticipate
Leave
While getting out
Comes from will
Good god
Not from sloughing off
In a cataclysmic drift

NB

"A celebration of the question you are trying to learn how to ask."

Chris Mann – Web Designer

Barbara Bloom Jewish Museum As it were...So to speak

Brutal Shameless Mating

Brutal shameless mating
At first askew glance
It looked as if
Two scoter ducks
Were chewing
On the neck of the same neck
One from on top
And the other from the side
Witnessing a jealous rage

One beige duck
Trying to unhinge unsettle
The mating ducks
Black on beige
Then off to the distance
The other black male
White disjointed feather
Skirting back and forth
Clucking though not interfering
In the de-coupling the aftermath
Necks outstretched
Reaching toward
The day ending
Wings flapping wildly
Quacking discordantly
Swimming off in concentric circles
And then unthinkable
The other female
Rode the back of the one
With eggs newly fertilized
Imitating the mating gestures
Finally dismounting swimming
Toward the inlet
Remnant of winter thawed
Cattails waving nimbly
Along notched Meer shore
Never got it right
Lovemaking
Brutal blissful mindless
Bodies holding sway
Breath taken away
Curdling screams
Pleasure catcalls
Zero sum game
Thought
Spiritual gentle
Nocturnal love
Didn't know
Rather didn't grasp
The mating dance
The swooning sexuality
Mindless convulsive
And god worthy
Next day
Went again to see
Near sunset

There they were
All four
Frantically
Scurrying back and forth
Hyperkinetic
Though the one
With the tipped wing
Laying back
The threesome
Chasing back and forth
In different formations
Beige upon beige
Black in the center
And gulp startling
The loved one
Had no feathers on her head
Her scalp shorn
She looked scared
Eyes staring straight out
Is plucking off feathers
Part of the love dance
Part of the mating ritual
Down to elemental parts
As in a *Ferlinghetti* poem
'Every animal ' he said at last
'After intercourse is sad'
In the aftermath the ducks
Settled on grass under a tree
In the moment of procreation
Bobbing on the Meer
Furious motion
Stirring up the water
Springtime near
Ducks feathers rustled
To bare witness: attest

NB

Too Late: Perspectives

Too late
Your cruelty
Clear to me
Awakened
It was you
Who kept me
From my grandkids
And them from me

It was you all along
She your wife the excuse
Never really understood
How deep your rage your fury
Got to short circuiting
Curbing the natural flow
The love
Of a grandmother
For her grandchildren

You locked me out
Kicked me out of your life
In the past twenty-four months
I have seen the children three times
Severed from daily life
I am a postmark
Gifts create the aura
Of a relationship
Rip the wrapping off
Play and wander off
Great you say
When gifts arrive
Thanks, Mom Kids Like

Rendered impotent non-existent
It is by your hand
That I have been cut off
Banished removed exiled
This after I shared
At the gracious 70th party
You and Rebecca hosted for me
Now I am just a grandma and a writer
Now I am just a writer
No matter how mediocre or futile
And as you are wont to say
You have real relationships
Are needed necessary
To Rebecca's three kids
By inference and not yours

I have to find the wherewithal
To visit if for a spare three days
My heart too pained
To repair damage done
I am old
Daily I lose the luminosity

The spirit the energy the humor
The knack to play
Within *their atmosphere* (Anna Freud)
Their lives a mystery to me
I am now to them
The woman who had
Their father in her belly

She asked *why I didn't come more?*
She asked *why I didn't move there and become their mother?*
She the middle child the only girl just six
Too late, too late
I wish that I could fly
There's danger if I dare to stop
For a very important date
I've got a date with ...
I can't be late for ...
I'm late. (Alice in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll)
Nullified removed exiled
Put in my place
Your rage at me
Forced this play

I am into the thick of it
Dying
Too late to recoup
The sadness just beginning
Undeniably revealed
My oldest child
Kept me away from his kids
A most venal and heinous
Display of displaced Freudian rage

Nexus
To ask to come
If for abbreviated visit
Just enough to sustain
And tolerate
A bridge to before
And to nowhere
Nothing extant
I breathe a request
I cannot make
To do so

Would prolong
The courage
To create
My death voyage

Back in time
Forty-seven years
To lullabies
Hosannas
For my newborn son
Glory be to the newborn King (Virgin Mary Joan Baez)
Tolling now
Death knell
Soon to mount the ship
To *Byzantium*
Never to turn around
The rupture brutal final
Ripped away
From your children
Hurt damage pain
Never to be undone

NB

A Covenant

You broke a covenant
Brokered a deal with god
Offered a sacrifice
I your Isaac you my Abraham
No lamb this time around
You offered me
To appease ease
A rage hurtling
Needed to get out
The rage the fury
I the repository

Relax now
Wound drained
I am broken
Ripping your children
From my life
Suddenly abruptly
Rudely
After we had fallen in love

After we needed each other
After we were hip and bone
You have pulled me apart
Distraught
What pain is eased
By this cruelty

Chastened
Brutish horrifying
No more bargaining chip
Hanging around
Grandma, come here
Somehow always knew
Kicking around inside you
An ineluctable
Persistent need
To bring harm to me
I handed you over to your father
You took your kids from me
Retribution for being abandoned
Left at the mercy of your
Gun brandishing bullying father

Time is lost
Not to be gotten back
Aged exponentially
While you kept me away
The mother in me wants
In equal measure
To balance the weight
My sorrow and your rage
The door ajar just enough
I look on with dimming eyes
A soft landing
Never really knew
Where your anger
Would lead to
No relief here
For you or me
I will die
Leaving you
To take in
How and where
It all went so wrong

NB

OMG – OH MY GOD!

Aaron Swartz – Tech Genius – Martyr – Suicide at Age 26 – Two years earlier indicted on multiple felony counts for downloading several million articles from the MIT academic database JSTOR. (New Yorker, *Requiem for a Dream*, Larissa MacFarquhar, March 11, 2013)

“This, I suppose, is the actual problem,” Swartz wrote, long before his suicide. “I feel my existence is an imposition on the planet.” Aaron Swartz suffered from Ulcerative-Colitis.

A doctor for relative last night told me that he’d had some very painful experiences with patients with ulcerative colitis committing suicide. Apparently co-morbidity with depression is common.

My doctor relative told me that some of his ulcerative-colitis patients seemed to be doing much better until the moment when they suddenly committed suicide, and that there’s some speculation that U.C. can alter liver functioning, which in turn can cause other medicine to cause impulsive behavior like suicide.

Ben Winkler, a friend

.....

Dr. Richard Gottlieb, psychiatrist, told us about a patient a female with ulcerative-colitis who had surgery similar to Luca’s who when she was about twenty committed suicide. He was perhaps trying to forewarn.

NB

.....



I'm attaching a picture of the most amazing tree I saw at Príncipe Real in Lisbon where I spent the weekend as a break from Madrid. Reminds me of the baobab from the Little Prince (not in appearance but in mythological status). It also reminded me of you and how your vision has supported so many young people (like me) and how we are now spreading and dispersing in every direction.

Andrea Hill

Ducks

Learning about love
From ducks
Loyalty constancy
Ducks on the Meer
Dancing
Wings flapping
Seductions
Rival pursuits
Heads jutting
Necks arched
Eyes flaring
Feathers flying
Beaks calquing
Wings span

Mate secured
Love captured
Keepsake for life
Year after year
Seems like same pairs
Recognize their markings
I spy
Watching
The constancy
The graceful tours
Of the Meer
Heads bend
Deep down
In the water
Downy tails
Jut heavenward
Occasional
Mad chases
Intruders
To their ever
Gyrating flotilla
Is this love?
Or just the natural
Flow of things
Consciousness
I think
Too often perverts
Our grasp of love
I watch the ducks
Anthropomorphize
Absurdist deduction
Instinct over consciousness
However love exists
Couldn't hold a candle
To the ducks
Flapping and fluttering
Mounting cruising
Concentric circles
Flotillas
Seductions
Surrendering
Oh my heart
Into which
Sadness creeps
Eviscerating
Love escaped

No one stayed
Loyal to me
Spirit that
Intertwines all of life
Lost its way with me

NB

Why Is It So Hard?

Why is it so hard?
First love
Parting with the ending
Ended more than
Fifty years ago
Want to rewrite
Rearrange
Relive
Can't get you back
Can't get it back
Tick tock
The clock
Closes in
And yet
I sob
As if the loss
Was yesterday
Regret
Too small
For what I feel
Saying
Over and over
Goodbye to you
Even as I die
I will try
To get you
Back
One more
One last time
Can't do it
Part
You exist
In present tense
As if

Tomorrow
Will come
And we
Will have
Yet another
Go at it
Have another turn
At first great love

NB

An Apostrophe

An apostrophe
Moving off to the side
A blip
A cloud dispersing
Life evaporating
Just because
Just because
Accept accept
No choice
Life shapes
Knowing itself
It's shape
Past present
Future
Here a glimpse
I move
Off to the side
It is in
The natural order
Of things
Still
In the denouement
We feel pain
Accept accept
Life and its aftermath
We move off
Center stage
Accept accept
It is the prelude
The grit and guts
Of it death
Glimpsing
Recollecting

The all of it
The past fades
Eludes
Dims dims
Relent
Relinquish
Present tense
Move
Back off
Accept accept
Time left
Just a flick
A riff
When to stop
Desist
Let the declension
Take its place
Find its end
Cut off appetites
Move off
With grace artistry
Shape a shadow
A memory
Standing
Off to the side
Wondering
How my children
Will remember me
I watch
The clouds
Disperse
Vision occludes
Find a song a myth
To subdue
The incredible sorrow
I fell moving on
The final date
Yet certain
What is the what
Of my fate
Future photos
Stills fade
In death
I will be story
And mystery

NB

The Ending

The ending
If not predetermined
Can be calendared
If suicide
A contravening gesture
Backing from muffling breaths
Who then can determine
When death will come
But mine is close
Days weeks months a year
I feel it in every gasp for air
In every memory lapse
More frequent and mostly about names
Actors, movies, artists, spelling oh my god
Words I know words but not the order of their letters
And people's names not places yet
Not places yet to forget
But it is happening thinning membranes
Fibril once hard-wired
Now as mushy as my upper arms and thighs
Repulsive sight the flesh sagging
Connections to muscles and tendons flagging
It is in the bible
All life comes to an end
And things we construct
Die with us or perhaps not

Uncle Joe mother's twin
Who will remember him
After I am gone
He was an ogre a monster to his daughters
Heroic monumental to my mother to me
He was neither but that is how remembering is
Left in trust to those closest in proximity
Legends of distemper live on
Greater longevity than kindness
Brutality has its own kind of legacy

Who will remember my father or his stories
Or Issy his father or his mother Sarah
Sarah left with lovers on weekends
Her husband watched as she drove off
She said she did it to get good coats
Handsome ones for her sons

But Issy her husband was a master tailor

Life runs its course in the turrets the gullies
Of other's memories no matter
How you shape your *narrative* as they say
The mythology lies in experience thereof
We are seen differently by each child each friend
In the end we belong to them
Tyrannical or sweet the brute wins the day
The reverberations and after shocks too great to shake
Unbridled memory swirls the headwind
Blows pivot behind a privet hedge
Abrogating abridge endings

I pop half-aspirins like *M&M's*
Sweet shells brilliant colors intersperse
A day ready with premonitions
Nimbus clouds shape and disburse
Shadows elongate chasten
The past is forbidding the future more so
Desperate not to have last breathes
Gasp in public spaces
Want to wander off
Or shut irrevocably the door of my room
Die without witness or demon

My daughter's panic assuaged
Suicide a death of my own making
I watch her deep sadness
Painfully reminiscent
Her husband her father transposed
Animal fisticuffs and surly rants
Husband and father
Releasing uncontrollable rage
Primal sexuality male to male
This *Wasp* from Washington State lost his grip
Wrested from him a fury too familiar
On our family tree
Sin to the third sought him out (Exodus: 34:6-7)

Synthesize time and place
Pace easing erasing myself
Indebted to the Internet
Acquired scope depth
An autodidact renaissance rebirth
If tyranny of childhood claws away

Veneer of peacefulness betrayed
Venomous crazy mother
Upends growing dementia

Wanting not to witness
The thick skein of family history
Paralyzing force on my children
Polymorphous the sickness
Love its paucity its inevitable failure
Finding and choosing the wrong other
And then the inevitable decoupling
Observing the hurt and suffering
Lives crashing down
Family's splintering and scattering
Tyrannical fist of unresolved pasts
Infiltrates spores poisoning the air
Festering unconquered unexamined
The stench of fear permeates
My children struggle I watch
Wondering how love eludes us
Over and over and over
Making empty marital vows
Never in a position
To make them in the first place
How far back what family history
Brokered this uncertainty?

Hold on fast to a persistent desire
To find that cottage on a bluff
Solitary with sunrise and sunset
And then to dim the day
Releasing the fabric of my life
Letting it billow and fray
Pulsing into final darkness
Releasing the children
To create their own narratives
Distinctive from mine
Breaking the yoke
The biblical stranglehold
Kept from knowing
Children of my own
Never had the wits or ware
To find and hold onto enduring love

Can one overdose on baby aspirin
Yes can bleed to death
Lessons in daily living as life ebbs
Wondering if it's possible to break away
Step beyond the shadow of family misery

Love daunts taunts
Shimmery ephemeral
Grasp tenuous
Fear lashes vise grip
Easier to cope
Than fear loves loss
Pithy if ordinary last words
Live each day riveted
To what is possible
Find love if fearing its loss
Love never as harrowing
As running from it

Naomi Barber
April 2012

No More Waiting

No more waiting for John
I will not be the willow in his arms
I will not be folded into his skin
A shiny papoose
I was a league from love
I could say goodbye
A simple whimper a slight tear
The letter went off
Now I see him a soldier
At the exit door
My South Pacific soldier
Eclipsed
A moment for true love
A chance, my chance
I let go
Why? I will never know!

NB 2008

Taking Stock

Taking stock
At a rundown seaside hotel
My Casablanca, my Mozambique
A silver shimmery sea
Restless churning
Still whipped up
Torrential rains after mid-night
No one is at the sand or out walking
It is after 9am, joggers have left for work
I found my silken paradise
'50's unchanged at the Jersey shore
Sound machine lulls yoga meditations
Ocean sounds bird songs and Errol Garner
Time whipped time warped
The New Jersey shore
Asking for nothing
That is why I rode the train
To feel nothing, to believe nothing
To know nothing more
Dear shimmery sea
Cataracts blur like morning haze
Legs still too wobbly reluctant
To wander into waves
Beyond knee deep
The New Jersey undertow entices
What more to give up negate
To walk the sea
My own pearly gates

NB 2008

Here's Looking at You

Repulsed
The profile
It my grandma Sarah's sour face
Although bitterness does not slip off my lips
I am still at hurt and mourning and regret
Struggling with myself to forgive and forget
To let go
To stop asking why
Why no love why the pain
Kicked each day
The yielding smile on my face
Closed shut each day the morning sappy blossom
My body strong and healthy
Not disfigured
Life did me no harm
Yet I chose wrong
Over and over and over
Her shrill bite still rings in my ear
To take away and diminish each day
The life to which you gave birth
Mother where was the *mother* in you?
Moments from sixty-eight that jade-like age
We should be settling old harms
I cannot forgive and move on
I cannot reconcile
Never having chosen love
To dance, to shower, to whisper
To tell secrets to laugh across a meal table
To cuddle under down
To kiss and kiss and kiss
I am trying to move on
Dear sweet heart was hopeful
Flapping uncontrollably at times
Like a loose awning or crazy flag
Heart stop hoping and longing and regretting
Let us slow down together
And move on
The day is bright the sea shimmery
A chill a brisk wind
The sea's song

NB 2008

.....

Luca, Destiny's Child

Sea, get bigger
More grasping more turbulent more wild
I have a child
Sea screams with a crazy undertow
Push frenzied waves eat up more shore
Sea become more fierce
Rise up waves engulfing a wild wide mouth
Salty water spin
Untamable unfathomable uncontrollable
Still it does not assuage
My grief my desire to grasp and understand
A son whose stomach was ripped from him
Who I took in
An indigenous infant from a tropical rainforest
Now I look on
Nearly twenty years old
Wandering in a pot and beer haze
The song of the parrot
The house on stilts abutting the trees
Who put this infant on my knee
What desire for what need
This is the love I have given myself
This boy holds my purest love
A foundling I brought home
To whom do I turn?
Who has the answers?
Disease ravished
Large intestines lifted out
Diseased life devouring
How to understand
What goes beyond grief?
Sea, dear truth
I took a child into my arms
Who did not come from me
I a mother who sought out
A child of another's womb
Henry Moore's broad massive mother
And wee child
I am that universal figure
Lifted from the marble the stone
I am what you found
In the great stone's veins and hollow
Magnificent woman huge thighs mountain high
Stirred the sea within beyond grasping

A love I found deep inside
For this my now maimed found child

NB 2008

Riptide

Rip loose
Howl
Wolf call
Pulling out and away
The sea goes out
Waves pull away
Water dark murky foreboding
Inside a cry
Looking for freedom
Freeing up
My boy's pleasures
Electrical currents
Waves sensation
A son who didn't die
Dies each day saved
Riptides rip currents
Pulling away from me
But no freedom no peace
The cry the cry
Won't subside
Won't pull out with the foaming sea waves
I am drowning from within
I wept torrential once
Scratching at the Albuquerque sky
Leaving a desert home
Within a Navajo bosom
Brought me to infant suckling
Fifty years of tears
Mother's voice would never leave me
Her repudiation her hatred
When I let at eighteen I gave her room
Dear crazy wild sea
Still waiting for release
Roaring sea
My heart swollen with sorrow
The tears, the tears
Swollen salty stalwart
Who do I weep for?
What sorrow the keepsake

NB 2008

She Still Makes Me Sad

She still fills me with sadness, longing surprise
I still get hurt
I still am amazed
I am filled with rage bitterness unremitting longing
Never moved beyond hating her
Suicidal eighteen to twenty-one
I left one college went to another
I never went to college
Treading water to keep my head above
I could never have married the right man
Had no feminine wiles
No nose for love
Went to therapy
Once when I was twenty-one
And then again when I was thirty-seven
Divorcing escaping
Trying to *make everyone whole*
The goal she said
Amazing I am moments from sixty-eight
A little plump a little saggy
I work. I love my children
I believe my children love me
My body works
My mind is lively
Everything is in *high definition*
No poems at my funeral
Mother warned me years ago
Held to the promise
When she died at ninety-three
I could not dredge up conceive of
How to describe her us me
I still that infant
With scouring mouth latched to a burn-freeze tit

NB 2008

Frank

You were a fish I caught
Too small
I broke the law!

NB 2008

Bleeding Out Hate

*"Meekness barely disguises her inner longing," (NY Times 2/23/10) Review Met
La Boheme)*

Bleeding out hate
Taproot to toe
Blood stuck
Clogged arteries
Passageways
Clotted butter or cheese
A bent tree
Too close to ground
Shadow filters sun
Limbs gnarled and twisted
Hatred just won't flow
Burls abound grotesqueries
On trunk and bough
My mother root source
Sap of discord
Ran sweet to seduce
Taproot oozed
Mother forgave herself
For hating me without reprieve
Beyond death
She is still here
The din in my ear
The quiver of her bow and arrow
Diana always aiming hard for me
Her disgust of me rivets
You dear prince man of my dreams
You took her disgust
And stampeded me
You took her disgust of me
Her twisted feelings
Of love and hate
Her obsession
Transposed her words
Sexual innuendo temptation
You converted desire
Into gasping despair
Mother tempered
Overflowed with so *sorry*
Mother formidable concoction
Of the *Holocaust* and *Depression*

What dynastic history
Got you to draw blood
Chip on your shoulder boulder
Raw rock of immigrant first step
Hostage sense of wrongful entitlement
Free floating belonging nowhere
Women hoists to some distant star
Mother flipped love to hate
But you were worse
A pig in sheep's clothing
A lap dog you hugged my leg
Weight on my feet
Never stopped insulting me
Reminding me of how terrible
How my best days were gone
How my face was dropping
Faster than a winter sun
My days numbered
You're ascendance
Trucked on my descending
Sadist overlord murderer
Marquis de Sade without the charm
Poseur pretender cipher the words lodged
The venom rides my blood and body
Like a fierce Tsunami
I am crushed ruined defeated
It is more than a decade of
The almost two decades
I spent pummeled beaten down
Disgraced before my children
Your love marked me
Marked me branded me

Being humiliated embarrassed
Ephemera early dandelion buds
Wisps along the beams of sun
No relief no pause from hating you
You were the tyranny that followed
My mother reinvented reincarnate
Running roughshod polluting my daylight
I live tide of retribution and venom
Capsized twice by the wild mean
Ambitions of immigrant's children
Twice removed one Jew one Italian
Starved for place and station
I became their Tabula Rasa

Whimpering the biggest fight back
Stillbirth moments alive
Died over and over again
In other people's hands
Willing victim or inevitability
Times tortured vengeance repeats and repeats

Naomi Barber
February 2010

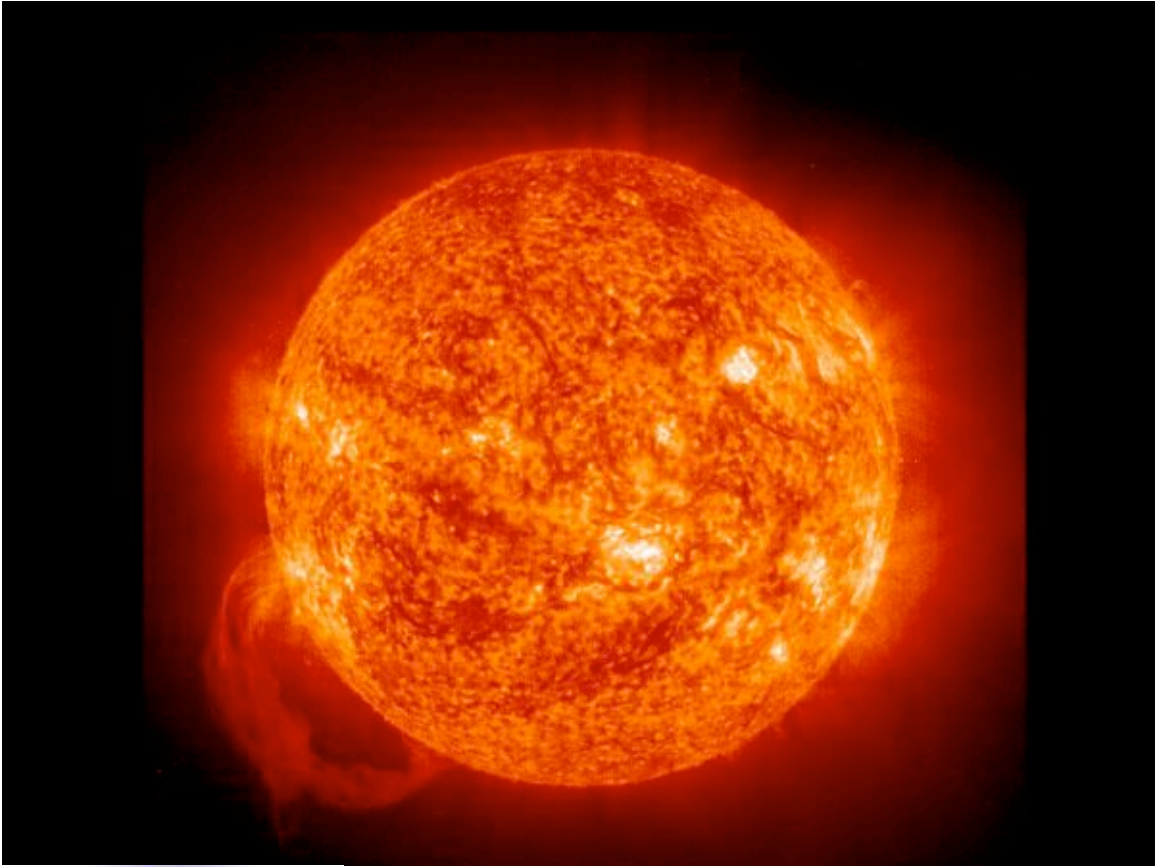
**NISBY--i just wAnted you to know that i safely reached and pasSED my 98th
birthday yesterdaAY--ALIVE AND STILL WRITING POEMS SUCH AS THE
FOLLOWING. LOVE UNCLE HARRY**

HARRY SAYS TOO SOON IT IS BYE BYE

WE WAIT AND WONDER
BY HARRY WEISS

And then A day comes, We blink
And we become instantly extinct
No one, NOT ONE, escapes this brink
OUR future is over. we are succinct
No more chance to dream , to plan or think
To golf, to play pinnacle, scrabble, tiddily wink
So have fun, kiss someone, and drink

Uncle Harry's coincidental birthday wishes july 17, 2013



My Place in the Sun -

Three muse and nine caryatids
Lift Duke Ellington and his grand
Bronze and gilded
A slip of sun catching
The golden glint
He faces east
Dazzling ornate sensual elegant
Jazz psalms of sound
Serenade Harlem gateway

Duke Ellington forever
Music he said *a compulsion*
Pulsing jazz sultry sound
Jazz time bending riff
Happy-Go-Lucky Local
In my bed as sun sets
I see this monument
And hear my father recount
How he stood in
When one of the Duke's
Bass players took sick
Kith and kin slap style bass
I can see my father
That dangerously seductive
Smile holding his bass
As he watched
Face in riveting swoon
The Duke's baton
Glissandos pluck slap and bow
The Duke's baton
Holding the sound to sigh and serenade

Walking west on 110th
Ellington in fade
Come to Malcolm X Boulevard
And Malcolm Shabazz Plaza
An esplanade of biblical plantings
And mosaic sidewalk paving
Tapping into the biblical Malcolm
Bringing on reflection and contemplation
Entering the streets where Malcolm walked
Surfing riding the stones
Edging plantings
The hard splitting sounds
Balletic and risk driven
Skateboarders the hard beat
Of reflection now

Moving West
Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard
Minister and legislator
High styled woman lover
Felled by corruption
Traffic islands of trees
Restore and commemorate

And then there is
Frederick Douglass Circle
Where a Christo-like wrapped
Statue stands facing north
Up Frederick Douglass Boulevard
Controversy not surprising
About unveiling the sculpture
Prominent on the circle
A wall of thick black marble
Filled with constellations of stars
And quotes of river and sky
Paths to freedom
Signaling to the underground
We are coming
Slipping through brush and bramble
Rubbing off the scent
For galloping horses bounty hunters
On to freedom
Abolitionists' safe spaces
Myth or fact
Frederick Douglass stands wrapped
No date set for unveiling
Frederick Douglass slave to statesmen
Black wife to white one
Saw photo tall man
With walking stick
On pedestal
*"I prefer to be true to myself,
even at the hazard of incurring the
ridicule of others, rather
than be false, and to incur
my own abhorrence,"* so
sayeth he Frederick Douglass.

From Frederick Douglass
To Duke Ellington
Beautiful young trees
Line 110th Street
Facing the northern most
End of Central Park
Glacial boulders rise above
The path within its enclosure
Perhaps this the most
Glorious of all Central Park
Olmstead and Vaux
Excavating a pond

Finding water just beneath
The Harlem Meer
With Duck Island
A nesting place for birds
And not long ago
This end of the Park
Neglected and avoided
Host to rats and mattresses
And cars sunk into
The muck of the Harlem Meer
Restored to exact specification
By the Central Park Conservancy
Now sanctuary to egrets and cormorants
And herons and buffleheads
And geese and ducks and swans
Trees infested with beetles
Pulp nibbling tree eroding
Rapidly replaced often with willows
Trees are mourned
When they are cut down
This Meer has a heart and pulse
It has come to life
The community strolls in awe
And with gratitude
And fishermen fly fish
And toss back catch
And turtles bask on rocks
Near eddies and summertime's
Jazz concerts on Sundays
Call to the community
Who dance to the Latino
And Afro beats
And on Thursdays in the summer
Beneath paper lanterns
There is dancing
Swing and samba and boogie-woogie
Recently *Knish Nosh* opened a stand
Old fashioned stuffed knish
And *mile long* hot dogs
Nice days wheel chairs abound
From the home for chronically ill
Here nature's poison darts
Are visible in the human
Trembling shaking tossing
The north end of the Park
Tolerant and embracing

At the south end
Of the Meer
The *piece de resistance*
A formal garden
The Conservatory Garden
With mannered fountains
And perennials and clipped hedges
And a bi-annual flowerbed
With tulips in the spring
And chrysanthemums in the fall
Entering the Garden
Is to be transported
To honor a day
And its life and colors
I am here I am alive
You take my breath away
My place in the sun
It doesn't seem twelve years
Since we relocated here
Luca and I now a twosome
Mother and son
Soon joined by our
Rescued chocolate lab Pete
A topic of conversation
On daily walks in the Park
What kind of a dog is that?
I thought so
I had a mix
He's got some beautiful color
His coat as chocolate
As a darker tone of black skin
Circling the Meer
As if the Westminster Kennel Show
Stopped and chatted
Stopped at each request
To pet *always ask*
I would say to kids
And Luca and I told everyone
About the thick scar
On Pete's neck
And the barbaric treatment
Leading to arrest
Saw the police papers
Who could do such a thing?
Who could hurt a dog like that?
And each time my heart

Would skip a beat
Sorrowful eyes meeting
Family building
Harlem found us a home
Unnerved by splitting
Up a family
This *bosom of Absalom*
Took us in

NB 2010

The Tale of Swans

And so on this day
I join a chorus of grievers
We stand at the edge
Of the Meer
In disbelief
We shake our heads
Our shoulders tremble
That's not good
Why would someone
Harm a swan?
That's not good
One of our swans
The swans that belonged to the Meer
Was murdered killed on a Saturday night
In early May
Probably the male
For the one left behind
Just glides silently
No headlong thrust of neck
No puffed out wings
No plunge and assault
The sentry at Duck Island
Yup there were eggs in there
Baby swans coming
He was keeping those geese away
How could he be gone?
Gone, dead, just not there
And I among the mourners
Left my house each day
Expectant relieved
To find the swan couple
Knowing they could
Just fly off leave
They're wild birds

A park ranger
Shared one day
And now a wild swan
Neck dipped deep in pond
Swan our swan gone
I felt sickened
Filled with the nausea
When life overcomes
I scour the banks
One swan is not there
Killed murdered
How could they
Searching
Eddy and perimeter
Nest abandoned
Looking for
The lone swan
An eerie emptiness
On the pond
The death formidable
The eulogy begins
Conversations
Overlays of sorrow
And disbelief
The family of the Meer
Conversations overheard
Echoing reverberating remembering
That swan
He's got babies coming
He's battling off intruders
Swans lift their wings jut necks
Get aggressive sensing danger
They stayed the whole year
They come back year after year
They fly south if they can't find food
They are loyal
They stay with their mates forever
They are monogamous
They are so peaceful and serene
A swan killed a small dog
Near the Bethesda Fountain
The dog in pursuit
Now our lone swan is gone
What? You lost your swans?
Recounting the disappearance
My granddaughter age five asks

Never tell her of the killing
Yesterday on the Meer
Before the brutal murder
Fly fishing a heron waits
The cormorant dives for fish
The egret hides in the reeds
Spine tingling erotica
Leda and the Swan (Yeats)
The swan phallic
Glides mythic
The swan puffed out exerting
Dominance head down
Neck bent strafing intruders
His space inviolate
When babies hatch
They will be gray at birth
Conversations lull the day
Neighbor to neighbor
All devotional of the swans
Each imagination and heart
Captivated connected
We wait expectantly
To see the swans
Swimming the Meer
Protecting
The broad boundaries
Of Duck Island
The brush and thicket
Within which eggs
Are being protected
Ferocious wings flap
The female glides
Just near Duck Island
Brush and tangle
Sunday off on the corner
Of the Meer
A cluster of people
Stand near the edge
There is something stark white
A large pile of feathers
Lying limp a dead swan
I do not go too near
Stop and look on
Often the swans come
Too near the banks
They hear the soft voices

They navigate the fly fishing lines
They gobble and peck
Bread and rolls tossed
Warned not to feed
We bring breadcrumbs
No official deterrents
If warning signs
My neighbors and I
No names exchanged
Talk about
The swans
As brethren
As kin
Swan to person
And person to swan
Critical connections
Eyes joined pleasure
Not to be measured
Worry as anxious
Family members
When we can't locate
One swan or the other
Mostly they swim together
A Pas de deux
Two swans
So central to our lives
And then one
Found dead
By our collective
Outstretched hand
Willa who iterates scolding
What you lost your swans?
Takes a walk with me
Around the Meer
It is early September
Look Willa
There are the swans
They have come back
They have come home
To be with us
Again on the Meer
With our community of friends
Neighbors gather
The swans survey
The full body of the Meer
Forming shadows on water

Hiding in reed and thicket
We must warn a murderer lurks
In our collective presence
A killing hand perhaps
A hairbreadth a heart beat away
Proud warrior and mate
Thrilling us with glide and flutter
Again we bring them too close
Offering breadcrumbs
Instincts lost
Guards down
One outstretched palm
Will again hold
Poisonous feed
Swans we entreaty
Do not trust
Our open hand
Come too close to us
Our naïveté
Our innocent offerings
Will bring death
In one palm or another
Severed lost
Our sense of interconnectedness
Deluding daring
Swans come near less leery
Moving from fear
Fierce independence
Our blithe ignorance
Negligence
Will lead then again
To offering nary sustenance
But a death sentence

Naomi Barber May 6, 2010

Death Dying Died Revived, *One More Time* (Sinatra)

Death camps
Death promises un-kept
Death vamp
Death temptress
Death baiter

Wishes don't make dreams come true (Mr. Rogers)
Mother our Mother
Did you dream up death each night?

Did you have to beg to die
To sleep each night
Death to tuck you in
Rather than fuck your husband
Panicked sex was coming
Seductive enticing revolting
Defacing death to use as cover
You our maniac death-worshipping
Sex starved sex-crazed mother

This not the death
Spoken of by James Baldwin
Waving an orange chiffon handkerchief
Make love to your past to death
Not Wallace Stevens *death is the mother of beauty*
Not Camus *death first than life*
Rough transliterations
Transmogrification transubstantiation
Reviling life courting death
Begging to die to stay alive
Sex food kids scared her
Desire tormented epiphany
Art spoke to her
Paintings sculpture
Bosch to Picasso to El Greco to Chagall to Miro
Death lost its hold
With art our mother lost herself
Moribidity held at bay in pigment marble and clay

Death your most important moment, Sheila Evans
Guardian angel of our father
My brother and I stole him away from our mother
From her murderous hands
Stuffing him with medicines
His tongue swollen over-medicated
Dad was scared to death of you
The end is near he said
As we drove away from his home
No longer safe near his wife

Bach is too beautiful
Please not to play again he tells me
Moved on to *Celtic Odyssey*
Our Dad
Died by his own hand and mind
Stopped eating

Signaling his life had come to an end
Organza lace trimmed curtains lifted to April breeze
Dad you did death right, right by death
I am following close behind
A decade or maybe two to separate
Your death from mine
You wrote on your calendar
Bluma (wife) wants me dead how sad

*So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,
And Death once dead, there's no more dying then.*

Shakespeare Sonnet 146

Once dead no more dying
Or the dread
Death mine to consider
Climbs me like the promise of spring
I have this day I say
Stepping outside *this day is mine*
I look at the willows preening
Find the Meer swans
Lolling lazily near Duck Island
Three silly duck-geese white as wonder
A frolicking bufflehead
As if finding himself on the wrong pond
Spring crocus, miniature daffodils
Pale pink blossoms ephemeral
All bode promise

Soft brown spots on forearms
Enumerate calendar's claim on me
Villon talks of *skin on wrists speckled like sausage*
Prophecy of what is to come unstoppable
Skin thinning hair balding appetite recoiling
Death bids feel it's hot breath
Scared to be outside
Dropping like flaking bark
Drool and poop body limp life gone
She found a beautiful place
Bottles full of sleeping pills
Not found for about ten days
Her mother writes
Where to find my beautiful place
Tucked away not to be found
Preserved for goodbyes
Maggots and dragons kept at bay

There is tragedy in every brush stroke. Mark Rothko

Death Be Not Proud

Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill me. John Donne

Gathering up quotes bouquets of wild flowers
A wreath to wear on the first of May
Death moved beyond gas chambers
Father who I remember every April 16
The day you took your last groggily breathe
It is now eleven years
Wanting to recapture a word or phrase
Humming birds alight a vision
Metaphor gauzy wings to lift
My quixotically framed disappearing act

Dying still more aspiration than deed
Dying this is so hard, she said
Our mother over and over
How to move off space and light
Die knowing
That beyond that moment
Never again to struggle into morning
Existential mad wild
Making every second count
Self-invention tattered frayed
Finally to say
No more not even one more day

Naomi Barber
Early April 2010

Snapped a Cold Branch Off the Wood

Snapped the twig broke off
Your eyes dimmed
Losing interest
I pulled the plug
Pulled the rug
The mystery of me
The compelling me
The me to befriend
The me desired sought after
Luster wore off

Luminescence
Forbidden darkness
Her life haunted
Others to illuminate
Your life too sad for me
Gone the mystique the stories the laughter
Too sad to be around
Exposed exploded out
Cruel and stifling morbidity
The corpse inside reeked
Couldn't hold up my end
Jester and merry maker
She retreated moved on
My exquisite harbor
She an artist way station
She was Marina Abramovic
She was an antique muslin dress with pubic hair smocking
She was Doris Salcedo wrapping old farm tables
With strands of Colombian mountain peasant women's hair
She brought founding artists to public venues
Their art mirrored her soul
She caught me in that orbit
I was another in her stable of artists

Then one day I became too unwieldy
Overshadowed by sadness
Life infiltrated me like early death rot
Her eyes averted she looked away
Just too sad to be around she told me
Jester friend artist educator I broke down
Weight of marriage gone sour
Father dying at the hands of my mother
Basking in the dung heap of the egregious
Debased family history and histrionics
The glory of defeat infiltrated me
She was repulsed turned me out
Into the rubble of old friendships
Tiresome people exuding misery
Idiomatic impulse for art gone
I had run my course
Too sad too bad call you now and then
And then never again
She slipped away
Plunging into a mountain ravine near Sarajevo
With a mission for *Refuges International*
She courted death she courted me

Defiant desirous to connect
She tired of me
Wearied of my plaintive story
Bereft of mystery merriment
Even before her death
I lost so much more than a friend
Never again to be seen as artist
Born with sharp song
Not to transcend manifest mediocrity
A moment to be artist
Lost in the glimpse of her eye her smile
Lost before that in my mother's death consorting howl

Naomi Barber
March 2010

Baying Stray on a Moonless Night

Baying stray on a moonless night
Mewling who am I who am I
Forty years this plaintive song
Bumped around a whoring stray
Alley to alley, night to night
Years curdled under the weight
Of the who am I who am I
Now at nearly seventy
The moon waits the howl
Not a song a hymn a prayer

Spilling over with could haves
Who scared me into solitariness?
Here we go dear soul
At the dawning of demise
Final closing of eyes and mind
Standing firmly in the past
Weeping at *Bach's B Minor Mass*
At five or six, pouring over art books
World-Famous Paintings, edited by *Rockwell Kent*
I was the girl her hand held by the kind mother
In the *Courtyard of a Dutch House* by *De Hooch*
I should have known when I memorized poems
And from memory could chant
 "I shut my eyes and sail away
 And see and hear no more."

From *My Bed Is A Boat* by *Robert Louis Stevenson*
Before seven I knew my life was in danger
Needed to escape the murderous rants rage
Of a mother's taunting streaking madness
Her passions too voluminous to hold in check
Her husband stricken held captive by her beauty
Our father's love blinders
My brother and I witnesses to the terrifying
A man a wife our father our mother unable to appease
Passions' pulsating unrelenting appetites

"When I was one-and-twenty," (A.E. Housman)
There was Mark Krupnick in Cambridge Mass.
A friend from back home, neighboring Irvington, N.J.
He belonged to that extensive out cropping of Jewish kids
Yiddish speaking parents, *Diaspora's* looping reach
Mark's family sent him to a *goyishe* private school
Then to Harvard the expanse for anchoring dreams
Beyond a common language they released him
From the panic of family dislocation
My family decimated by the *Holocaust*
Adamantly secular more American than Jewish
Religion the shucking ghost of might have been
Assimilation's knock condition for bare-knuckled ambition

Manifest in our home
Images of smoke chortling gas chambers
A mother's constant threats
To fling herself headlong into furnace or oven
Mythic calls for death to take her
Lunging intractable unrelenting desire

Spun off a twisted gnarled legacy
My childhood vigilant for her to return alive
Moon upon moon solitary still a whispering heart
Nights of razor edge clinging to the bed's end
Death plunges to stifle her wistful heart
Aching to soar on a *Mandala* of midnight love
My *Diaspora* a flight to leave behind
Mother's tormented midnight forays
Father's seductive hand wrestling
Death's besotted salacious heat
Infusions of passions amuck limned onto a daughter
Afraid of love afraid of life afraid of living
Fictive steward of an imaginary existence
Elusive identity hiding place for this emotional runaway

Walking near the Hayes Bickford in Harvard Square
I bumped into Mark K.
Two exiles from ghetto New Jersey
My heart fluttered hoped I was in a complementary self
He seemed so mannered and so scholarly
He was the Editor-In-Chief of the *Crimson*
The Harvard University daily and an honor student
He wore elegant gloves, over coffee asked why
He didn't take them off, *never do in public*
Hands too cold any air brings them to chill
Mine trembled whenever poetry surfaced
Unnerved by the claque and clatter of Cambridge streets
Head winds of philosophers and Nobel laureates
Coveted intellectual note in this academic sanctuary
Mark had risen to the top who are you now he asked
I am no one, no one to know
And with a flick of the wrist turned him into a caricature
A man to spurn a man to turn from at odds
With any my throbbing imagination had envisioned
He was way off course, sensing my disdain he left warning
Go on a Walkabout to find who you are Nibs
Or you will remain an anomaly to yourself
And undesirable for anyone with a moderately intact ego
Possible parting exchange in Harvard Square at the dawning of 1960

On a *Google* click, still wandering in a rainbow of selves
I found the words *Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, A.L.S.*
Lou Gehrig's disease, Mark Krupnick dead at sixty-three
The last years spent stiffened incontinent and speechless
His wife translating his eye flutters his son emptying catheters
His last words read by wife at memorial

"...my use of hands is dwindling so I must conclude soon."

Hands gloved hands cold hands dying hands
Did the onset of *A.L.S.* begin at Harvard
His signatory work an edited book entitled, *Displacement*
He was a scholar of *Jewish Intellectual Life* so said his obituary
Jewish Writings and the Deep Places of Imagination
Edited by his wife posthumously, he married late in his thirties
About the time of my first divorce
He was an essayist nomadic moving from university to university
Provocateur obsessed and kept in trance of Jewish intellectual life
He was as much in the desert of at the mercy of *Diaspora* as I was
A major book of his own as forbidding as his ability to speak at the end
Mark found true love a woman to hold and warm his hands
Eluded in my *Diasporic* wandering a great love for my life

Foolhardy I ran to marriage
Pole vaulting mother scaling the glass shards
The electrified sparking wattage of barbed wire
We slept an *ménage a trios*, husbands mother and me
We set the bible to quivering though not disbelieving
Mark of cold hands wearing gloves Mark whom I could have loved
Mark I found me tucked in your epitaph
There I was wife and partner one to remove gloves for
A face enveloped in pageantry and indecision
Lost my way, my hand to glint the golden wedding band
I was the book that never got written
The Jewish woman intellectual you saw so scared so hidden

*My bed is like a little boat;
At night I go on board and say
Good-night to all my friends on shore;
I shut my eyes and sail away
And see and hear no more. (My Bed is a Boat Robert Louis Stevenson)*

I am at the helm of that dear little bed boat
Never left harbor not a wind or challenge
To jiggle the imagination into daylight
No courage to abandon the auguries of ancestral nest
An abandoned cello rests in corner without string or bridge
Poetry notebooks stacked with mouse pee stains
Too dangerous to open or read or get rid of
Mark, I am a mother whose children are not disciples or clones
Bone and swollen birthing channel head crowned child on loan
Mark it is all history you are dead
And I never gave you the time of day

Never heeded your warnings
Your sad acknowledging expression haunts
Meeting once again at Cambridge University
I ripe with baby we hugged
I held onto your gloved hand too steadfastly
You smelled the rat my husband was right away
I stayed in a *Diasporic* dislocated state
Not a Jewish intellectual woman
Not a secular scholarly poet and musician
More amalgam of an unformed and unfinished self
No chances for transformation metamorphoses left
I never became that Jewish smart woman
The wife Mark wanted me to be
Dreams surfaced too late I saw the sweep of myself
At that chance meeting at Cambridge University
History dangled futility held the day

Naomi Barber aka Nibs Weiss
March 23, 2010

There are two types of people in exile – those who are victims and end up committing suicide in the Seine and those who become warriors, who are all their sadness to build an engine with big wings to fly, she said. Exile is my power.

Golshifteh Farahani Persian Filmmaker most recent film, The Patience Stone

In a Little More Than Three Years It Will Have Been My 50th Anniversary

In a little more than three years it will have been my 50th anniversary
Broke away rudderless marriage months short of turning forty
A proud little tug tough and resilient ready for the solitary long haul
Now breaths away from turning seventy the little tug put in dry dock
Worn clear of repair its engine chugged last whistle blown and then hush
On the expanse of the past ruin runs rampant unfettered
Flirted with life its hours its currents
Wisp of a girl her insides wild with turbulence
At twenty feet barely touching the ground
Lifting above fear and soaring toward wild exhilaration

Spirited a whirl whirligig of girl
Dreams dared not surface into daylight too dark
Lift of sprightly instep skirting dread
Dancing on the uptick of daylight
Hauling gravity's dark corners encrypted the balance in challenge
Tilting away from the open hand of romance a chance for eternal embrace
Princely arms opulent with bounty and grace
Thrashing convulsively panicked fledgling chances to have love lost
Danger flashes warnings girl spins out into tidal waves of fear
Turbulent love eruptions stoked her heated furies
Threats of being engulfed if submitting to love's wooing
Every man's dream of the perfect woman shameless chameleon
The right girl spun like butter like an embroidered sampler
Home sweet home, a proposal, a head kicked to whiplash
Thrashing bird crazy bird wind gusts thrust about
Empty hands release the crazy flutter turn away in a rush
At twenty my beauty would never be greater
A prince still in the wings
Men lined up against the artillery of my fear
Shoved into a revolving door by mad confusion
Swirling spinneret as the door spun to blur
The right one a love for my life blown asunder

I am fat ugly and stupid I told the psychiatrist
His impenetrable fortress face aghast
The grain of evidence so contradictory
The mirror so twisted and contorted
Distortions mine the faces of de Kooning women
Pulped-out mired incendiary and compelling
Suicide watch dare not contradict the girl of merely twenty
She lived sealed off in a blood draining sacrament
Fat ugly stupid the essential truth her vision of herself
Too dangerous to fix the mirror right
Splitting the atom at root of truth's contortion
Ruthless tenacious image of baby born breech
The psychiatrist asked *how where do you want to harm your body*
Oh a knife right into the stomach right where the womb is
He sits in silence watching the slight beauty
Trembling hands her professors thought her brilliant
The body close to devouring itself weightless
Fat ugly stupid and yet the men came
A chorus as distinct and different
All clamoring for her hand to keep in theirs
To clasp and promise into lifelong commitment
Even with the unsettled trembling like a baby bird
Wings still wet, flight uneasy and strange

And yet and yet as the psychiatrist looked out the window
After a final session and a formal goodbye
A woman as striking as Athena barely touching ground walked away
Men and women twirled their heads spun
To look at the beauty who barely touched ground
Her beauty astounding her eyes piercing
Another chance perhaps for her to embrace
She was the moonbeam the daylight leapfrogging shadows

I was that figurehead on the bow
I was that tug with two female names
Pushing against the tide tugging along a woeful past
A past that nipped at me angry as spurned harpies
I pulled against the tide and lost
Fifty years an anniversary a golden goblet
Sipped alone if indeed life spares me
At forty alone on a roof deck sipped champagne at my success escaping
A marriage that honored the dark and sordid in me
Pulled up anchor the weight that dragged me held me down
Telling me how to live and why and I complied, complied, and complied
Beneath the surface of the turbulence
Still the evanescent murmurs of a wish to die
Hair breaths from seventy defiant a will to live endured
Now filled with the heft of wrong choice
Now watching my body flee from me
Now gazing over years from my mountain top
My eyes push beyond the thickening scrim of cataracts
No champagne popping no legs twig-like to curl around
No memory to trace on stretched primed canvas
I roam the sheets midnights making snow angels
On my pearly white eight hundred cross-stitched Egyptian sheets
A memoirist tracing the events the days the years
Searching the moment when the will the appetite for life collapsed

Too many paths left unchosen
Ultimately dead ends swathed in darkness
Ancient as a tortoise instinct deadened lost in a sea of drift
All chance for love foredoomed

Will I have the courage to toast who I ultimately became?
What life I lived solitary pursuing sunrises and sunsets
Triumphant a better mother than the one I was lifted awkwardly from
Children launched, their lives their own I watch as the distance grows
Who will I toast on the aborted fiftieth anniversary?
It will come on November 11, 2012
I am reaching beyond the sordid shame I feel

I am reaching beyond sorrow
I am reaching to look up at stars
To look at the buds in mid-March blooming
The swans on the Meer glide wings fanning to spring breeze
My heart lifts sighting puffed up spring born pods
The air so sweet upon my skin
I love the way a morning begins a day to wander in
Should I be alive when the life defining date comes
I will lift a priceless golden chalice to my lips
Toast what was lived and that the great gift to myself
Never becoming mad crazy
Never attempting suicide beyond the plotting
If never anyone to share with to spare me with
Moving off feeling sloppily sorry for myself and in the end
I became fully roguishly conscious that as memory dimmed.

Naomi Barber
March 2010

I have no way, and therefore want no eyes. King Lear, Shakespeare

Little Ailments Eating Me Up

Little ailments eating me up
Munching around the edges
Bit by bit bite by bite
Wind gone right out of me
Defeat heating up blood pressure
I am quitting being pushed out
Life has had it with me
Or the other way around
But quitting is the option
The only one
Simply put I am just tired out

Nosebleeds lacy pees
Watching for swelling ankles and knees
Can't breath clumps of mucous clog
Swallow back spit it out, ugh

I am down for the count
Hacking cough head on stacked pillows
Sleeping upright
Wrestling down subduing cough

One inimitable truth
Never ever had a true love
The swell the undertow
Of that fact alone
Pulling death to me all the faster
Feeling so sorry for myself
All the squandering I've done
Fear was the stronger pull
Hatred and vengeance
Lived out her narrative for me
She is dead, mother
I was just her little sacrificial lamb
Mewling yew never left never grew

Kidney disease shines the high beam
Scrolling out an unremarkable life
Knew better much better
Reluctant or refusing to chose
Settled for shadows
To standing fully present
Exposed etched against
A brilliant blue sky
An illuminating sunlight
I die filled with shame and remorse
Embarrassed appalled
Quicksilver quit on everything
Just at the cusp the elliptical impossible
Fled hid ran from
As the bloom was to bud reach to petal
Curled fetal catatonic squished to invisibility
The girl well hidden fraught with desire
Mythic enter life threatening kidney malfunction
Parables of death wishes kept her well hidden
Ailments replete with incredulous prognosis
Death has entered
Was it will desire or accident
Sway with the devil or god
How did I get to end this way?

NB

.....

Taking a Tally

My time of day
Year by year
I thread my narrative
It is my turn
And yes
You did live too long
Or you lived too long
As you
Cringing in the corner
Of each year
Revealed
Now taking stock
I see no one there
My identity
So submerged
Learned to breathe
Without air
Any except yours
You intubated me
We shared your life
And still you railed
And flailed fist
Against your head
Ranting in rhythm
I wish I could die
I wish I were dead
My death wish
Buddhist whispering
Year by year
Me unraveling
Premonitions of what was to come
The years truncated
Tourniquets applied
To hold the rush
Of desire back
I marched to the tune
Of her song
All life long
Nighttime raids
Drone mother
I felt the pellets
Of your rage

Lamenting your death
Averting the pain of empty years
Holding back the torrent of tears
Missed the boat
Over and over
Love was all
Stolen on a compulsion
To please
Bits of myself to you
Morsels tossed your way
Moving through each day
Diminished so
Faltering halting breath
Eyes pushing through
Mounting cataracts
I tossed the life given
Sacred rite
Sucking off the umbilical
We stayed attached
Mad voracious mother
And supplicant sacrificial daughter

Naomi Barber
January 2010

Sorry Wrong Number

This is no longer a working number
What did I expect to hear?
Hello? Voice skipping over
Pockets of air holes
Voice on the glide
Of a swan's wings
Moving on and away
Death's rattle
Lighting's fierce crackle
The signs are there
Blood death to breathlessness
The hospice nurse
Had it timed
But for human error
Never far off

The cocktails metered
Measured, warning
Do not break seal
Dose death's last appeal
We are getting near
Although the fight
Goes beyond expected rounds
But then they didn't know
Mother, crazy wily Mother
Trickster 'til the end
All external to herself
Her self-invention
The dimensions of their lives
Her affirmation
Reflecting pools proof
Her clippings and *post-its*
Biblical scribe
Ancient deciphering
She got right into your lining
She got me just right
At tables with strangers
She would become
More them than they were
And now racing
From the closing hour
She baited and held off death
Death's companion
Death's dominion
Her pleads to die
Daily ministrations
And finally he, she, it
Came to get her
Her resistance fierce
Raging against the dying day (Do Not go Gentle into that Good Night Dylan Thomas)
The stuff of poems
She ranted and recanted
Finally fooled
Thrown off course
Last breaths not far off
Bastard death
Voodoo and *pooh-poohs*
Jewish warding off
Taping into other
Prayer howl and hoots
There it was
The inching claw of silence

Nothing more to say
Everything left to be said
Alarms go off
Death's sickle coming
For you, newly ninety-three
Dead, death
In the end did you in

Sollicitous son and daughter ashes to sea
Tossed onto castling what foam
The ocean's turbulence churning you
Soon to wash up with the tides
On a Jersey sandy beach
You came home
Your final resting place
Hurled off jetty
In early fall
Summer's call
No longer restless
Searing soul
In your mouth
Anger madness self-pity
Always the first words spoken
Phone line broken off
No message, automatic response
Phone not in service

Mom God Mom
You actually died
Safe passage good passage
My last words
Airbrush kiss on forehead
Still in last hours
Repulsed by you
Recoiled and backing away
Strength found
A proper goodbye
Not actually a lie
Reckoning comes next
The damage of your
Life on mine
Sky-high
Outer reaches of space
Breached
No way to escape

Bobbing in ocean foam
Unwilling home
Restless surf
Her body tossed
Baggy of ash and bone
The ocean home
There we are Mother
Squabbling no more
Battling bullets
Words missiles hurled
Disturbing my world
Never got off the turbulence
My body spasms
Your words gather steam
As you sense
My suckling mouth
Heart squalls yielding
Morsels of sustenance
Battle cries
Again separateness denied
Reaching beyond the grave
Yours the Atlantic Ocean
You are my hunger, my thirst
Life undone
Under the scorching stiletto
Words cutting me to size
A baby turned inside out
Bursting like hale from your mouth

We did it got to your dying first
As you lapsed backward
Into your mother's arms
Having had her forgive you
The breathy blues
Morphine cocktails
Subdue
You scratch back to her
Portraiture serene
Her thick black braid
The length of her back
Your own mother fearing you
You were to be feared
Your mother Sabbath's guardian
Broken English garbled tongue
Cradling face in hands
Head covered lighting Sabbath's light

Your eardrum piercing screams
Set holy candle's flickering
Not the murmuring prayer quieted
Your flailing reviling outbursts

Guttersnipe I called out
Six and eavesdropping
Affixed to her apron
Tethered there
Mounting fear
As I listened
Warnings of what was to come
Pain pulsing on forehead
Overhearing her venomous attack
Her mother's face in resignation
Her crazed child
Never stopped ranting
Her sorrow creased face
Archetype
Of motherhood's guilt swept plain
Guttersnipe, what did you say?
Protecting my grandma who with an embrace
Infused me with love and assuaged
Repulsed frightened
As my mother
Hurled killer insults at her mother
Her mother's sweet
Round face, the moon's keepsake

I thought I made her this way
Created this monster mother
I told the clinic shrink
An audience of saliva dripping
Residents in lecture hall
I on the virtual gurney of despair
Suicide's hand swiping
My mouth suffocating
Dread of living of life
Magic powers revealed
That I could take her
A cat neck-wringing mother
Dangling me at the abyss of hell
If I dare mistrust her word
Hellish dreams eclipsed
Sunrises wipe the slate clean
Forgotten

Dreams gone
Possibilities swamped
In dread deep and ancient

God reentered
At the end of her life
She *forgave* her mother
Remember just so
Loving daughter
Lifted off the Commandment
Enacted so, *honor thy*
Remember me thus
Curtsies of respect
Remember me so
Rearranging life's narrative
Truth not an element
At the end
Just perfect pictures, images
I was good in my heart
She told her mother
As she lapsed off
Reuniting rejoining her
Momma, Momma
Be With me
Her last words
The holy terror
She had some nerve
Good passage safe passage
You left life as you saw it
Everything emanates
You are my deity
The center of my Mandala
My world encircles you
Blinding sun
Run, run
Feet planted firm
I stay hooked to her
Although no answer
Phone no longer in service
Still, still she is not
Can never be dead to me for me.

Naomi Barber
January 21, 2010

No Longer Looking for You

Prelude to Abyss: The Goodbye Lasts Forever

*And if thou gaze long into an abyss, the
abyss will also gaze into thee.* Nietzsche

Why did I think you were?
Someone to run from
Escape
Hurl into darkness
Perilous foreboding
Love tricked me
I was tantalized
And scared
Wanted you
Since I was five
When you came to life
I fled and left you adrift
And cursing me
My Jean Paul Belmondo
I was your Jean Seberg
The cop my father
Foredoomed
Presumptive lover
The jagged jaws
Of the crooked
Throttled in the clutch
Of retributive madness
A mother and father
In a lifelong love brawl
How could love come out of this?
She banged her head against the floor
Stuck it into the oven door
He wrenched her back
By the thick of hair ends
Then off to bed
Night after night
Witness to this transaction
Kept me in trance
Held me in traction
My heart never to succumb
This was the love

If it burst forth
A flash flood with you
My Jean Paul B.
Counter point
Continuum thrumming
A beat never missed
This inner voice
J'accuse j'accuse you
Dear plundering father
Dad who with his bass fiddle
Plucked his fingers
To deep callous
Rather than risk the touch
He longed for
We were the road map
Affixed to Freud's wall
We were the stuff
Myths were made of
You the love of my soul
Just inadvertently
Stopped by
Stumbled into
The hellish sanctuary
My home
And saw it right

I am scraping seventy
And still it hurts
Still my eyes sear
As if watching Mother
The pounding the dragging off
The pleading for death
When what she wanted
Was to be wrenched
Writhing with hot orgasm
She wanted to scream
Rivet me ram me
Beyond the death
I crave and call for
My hot body blisters
Sends me to frenzied
Screaming catcalls pummeling
Her graven craving
Her heat sent her to tongues
Overcome overrun

Female hysteria for the rich
Vibrators relief for the rich
Jewish girl immigrant girl
Didn't qualify
She despised sex
She despised her body
In quick equation
The fury the barometer
The dimension of the longing
Her bodies' heat intolerable
As she beat her tom-tom head
She was calling out tribal chants
Relieve me run through me free me
She hunted him down our father
He was the familiar
Immigrant girl
Read too much
Drifting in and out of her
Longings just out of reach
Beyond her she couldn't
Climb mount over
Circumstance kept her captive
He tried to spare her
Capture her bring her back
The madness too thick
Too gnarled the passage
The escape the exile
Displacement the gnawing
Dreams of flight
Thwarted she was their hopefulness
Distilled all the poison fell to her
Perfect distillation
Escaped reassembled Jew
Who looked across the Hudson
And saw it was one too many
Crossings to make
That her undoing
The heat the passion
Twisted and gnarled
Torments shout
Her heart set to beating
Its spark its pacemaker
Occluded and kept from her
Her daily tirades
Tantrumming her rampant desire
Pounding excising cutting off

Wild beyond anything stifling
With a swift charge
The vibrator weaponry
Hysteria the thick curtain
To hide behind
Women backed into submission
By the quick instrumental
Induced quiver
Her voracious appetite for lust
Her pulling at herself
Her virtual *Cliterectomy*
Not reaching far enough
The words her last
A call to *Momma*

She never got to saying
Fuck me just fuck me
Those words never mine either
Sad night denied life
The life of my body
The heat of my heart
Just couldn't go there
Without consequence
Still below the surface
Get this right her plight
My legacy love had no place
It would always be just out of reach
Sacrificed on her throttling screams
A fear I just couldn't get beyond
Couldn't get through the madness
The dance continued
Night after night
I spared you
When I dumped you
All of this echoes in me yet
Pumped into us
My heart would never
Have its way with me
I had to make you
Someone bad
To be someone good
Saw *Breathless*
Fifty years later
Saw it first with you
Still not broken into
Still virginal pasture

You were the love
To love and not
Just the guy
To get it over with
Breathless tattooed
Fixed on my heart
You were danger
Someone dangerous
I turned you over
To my father
Quenching his sexuality
His a discrete titillation
Innuendo so out of character
He couldn't help it
In the end
He was just a man
Thunderstruck by a crazy woman
You were my man
My chance for a great love
I sacrificed you
On the alter
Of daughter devotion
And an overwhelming fear
Of the woman
Who would follow
Once you broke me
Broke into me
She would be wild
You were the tamer
In my life
You knew what brewed
Inside a daughter a child
Untouched even by one
Motherly kiss and with
A father gulping back
Temptation as he plucked
His bass fiddle
His face adrift with dream
His bass his shield
His armor he bowed
His way out of torment
I the object of his desire his fear
And you mine the heat
Too much the temptation
The salvation mine to grab
And hold onto

You would have loved me
Unequivocally eventually
The seed was there
You *thanked god for me*
Soon I would have been
The face the body the person
For your heaping gratitude
Being loved being loved being loved
Wrote my way out of love
Never to find a way back never
Hidden deep the warping hope
That we could begin again
Where we left off
Parting words, *why* you asked
So many years later
On a brief encounter, *why*
Backed into the hour the day
I let you slip through my fingers
Dumped into an army mail satchel
A post office box, dead end
Shaking in me the implication
Of this act taken in the heat
Of fear and desperation

I ran from you I ran from myself
You are married I am not
Hidden somewhere then
Looking back into fifty years ago
I see I did love you
I did really run from you
And now you are kind
Just to write back
And let me know
You are well and alive
The only question
In this futile game
Regrets and longing
Backward glances
Is did you love me
Or were you just
Using me as a salve
To move beyond
The woman you couldn't have?
Sober and resolute
Here now is our goodbye

Dear John, It is over!
You were in Germany
Called back to the military
It was 1961
My running shoes
Running toward you
The *looking for love*
Stopped over
My father finally urged me
To live at your side
Not even as bride
And then a knock
On my Irving Place
Rooming house door
There you stood in uniform
I got called back, you said
Going to Germany next week
It was Friday
We hopped on the back
Of your rented motorcycle
And drove down to Rockport
Holding too tight a prophetic ride?
Still in the thick
Of life goes on and on
Forever no choice
Can't be taken back
No mistakes undone
Regret a missing word
My vocabulary filled
With hope and endless possibility
Monday in a friend's car
A Bentley, of all things
Drove John to the airport
We kissed
A guy in a uniform
A girl at a terminal
As I watched him mount the steps
And turn to wave goodbye
A reenactment of *Casablanca*
John would capture it so
I gave the car back
And went to my class
At Boston University

Afterward meeting with
My Professor a jolt
The apocalyptic had happened
I left love a true love
On the ascent of the ramp
On a flight out of Boston
Time froze frieze frame
Love fled bled out of me
I not impenetrable invincible
I was a troubled girl
Love for me an affliction
My father my hand trembling
Dictated as I wrote the words
Dear John, it is over.
He *giveth* and *taketh* away
And as father's lap dog
No choice but to obey
But it was my heart
That gave way
Not father, love was
Too unbearable
I could not tolerate
Being loved
Now death haunts me
Hunts me down
I am ready to be a bride
I ran away just plainly ran
Frieze frame soldier on ramp
Now I plan for the unblinking eye
The blank stare without breath
No longer to wait
You will never come
To take me on your motorcycle
It is just my death and me
I ready myself to die
Dear John, It is over.
In the annals of the military
These are the dead letters
Piled up like so much
Military debris on the battlefield
The girl back home couldn't wait
With those words
You were erased
Wiped clean off the slate
Of my life
Like a drowned cat

Dream stomped out
Not looking
For you anymore
Strange odyssey
Held onto you
For year upon year
You were
The tender love
The love of my life
Didn't think
I had the right
Didn't want
To come
From the shadow
Of my longing
My appetites
Something frightening
The search
For you finally over
Time has me
Looking backward
Yet resigned
To enter
A final chapter
I have arrived
At the point
Of no return
No returning to you
No false hopes
No girl's daydreams
I stand humbled
In the powerful
Aftershock
Of a life unlived
Never did become
Jacqueline du Pre
Never did become
Sylvia Plath or Anne Sexton
Oozing in self-pity
I did marry
Two men
Who luckily obliged
Tormenting me
Keeping me tethered
A limp supplicant
Mother's script

Followed unerringly
Not going to look
Any more
No more *Goggling*
Your name
No more postcards
From the Guggenheim
Love chances gone
Love never happened
The way I imagined
Almost but not quite
Begging to forget
Begging to close the book
Begging not to hope
One last time
To open the door
And find your smile
And an invitation to ride, just ride.

Naomi Barber
January 2010

Making Tragedy

“everything everybody does is so - I don’t know-
not wrong, or even mean, or even stupid necessarily. But
just so tiny and meaningless and-sad-making.”

J.D. Salinger

“...it occurred to me that I had in my hands the
means of making myself an epic hero. What good is the
truth when those who were there are dead or scattered?”

“His suffering, as you are pleased to call it, would
be the stuff of tales to enliven the winter of his old age,
stories for his grandchildren. Fie on you. We will draw
him thin and fine.”

“...madness for glory...”

“The Lost Books of the Odyssey”

Zachary Mason

"I wonder if It weighs like Mine-
Or has an Easier size.

I wonder if They bore it long-
Or did it just begin-
I could not tell the Date of Mine-
It feels so old a pain-

I wonder if it hurts to live-
And if They have to try-
And whether-could They choose
between-
It would not be-to die.

"I Measure Every Grief I Meet"
Emily Dickinson

"The shame of being
Seen consumes me.

"I was pretty back then.
Maybe, way back then,

Before I began."

"Diagnosis"
Cynthia Cruz



Hyman Bloom Rabbi

A Small Sad

A small sad
Words
Just that
A small
Very small sad
Eviscerate
Rain on petal
Evaporates
Slides off
Essence
Slippery glisten
Glissando
Elision
Lived little
Knew better
Courage
Or destiny
Choice
Or fate
Truth
Restless

Ruthless
Depiction
Sacred
Breath
Heartbeat
Squandered
Slight to God
Or whomever
Pathetic
Small sad
Sundays sliver
Serpent served
Trifle tossed off
A Sunday worth
Of nothing
Not nothingness
Drab pretext
Sorry Camus
Mordant days
Of dryness
Dallying
Unlived
Bleak oblique
Alive within me
Nothing
Desire rots
Ordinariness
Try Gabriel
To salvage
Trumpet something
Triumphant
Mordant and mundane
Insufferable
Squander
Oceans crossed
Steerage's stench
Never moved
Beyond Avenue A
Communal baths
Dreams dashed
The madness
Of immigrant tongue
Kosher pickle bins
Bumping
Crowds overrun
Some dreams begun

Faltered and fell
The swollen shores
Of hope
Dashed
Small sad
The fervor
Of transport
Not to last
Nazis missed
Their chances
With us
Forsaken
To whom it is given
Dead you are dead
Mother and father
And I may or may not
Make much beyond 70
Diaspora defined us
Greater than God
Grand prophesy
Doomed, destined
Reeking of steerage
Jews arrived
On these swift shores
Days months years
Escaped
Murderers and marauders
To live so small
Inevitable
Ancient sins
Coursing blood
Fleeing breaking
With the familiar
Heat of murder
On heels
The enemy without
On distant shores
The enemy within
Harbinger
This family
Circling
The bait
Of the past
In the tongue
In the taste buds
Lashing out

Torment dread
Blood boils
Mouths steam
Vanquished
Dreams
Living small
On ghettoes
Mean streets
Stalled on
Avenue A
Footing lost
Twentieth Century
Angst
Strangle hold
Lives crushed small
Pestle and mortar
The hurting comes
The skin I live in
Tattered layers
Ignoble wind
Drowning in lament
The chance
To begin again
Squandered
The new world
Old fears and hurts
Old shame
Blame Judaism
Its justifications
Of suffering
Because of pogrom
God's Chosen
Slaughter, first sons
Evidence
Of being best loved
Being poor and Jewish
Harsh yet trivialized
Talmud
Oblique and lost
Sobs of
Cries for entitlement
Suffering
Diminished
No gifts or rewards
For being pummeled
Pogroms

Leading not
To entitlement
But disgrace
Shallow embarrassment
Inherit pain and rage
Sad small
Mother we lived
In lower case letters
Furies
Dioramas
Tiny characters
Joseph Cornell boxes
Of defeat
Coming close
But never getting there
You and I
Squandered time
A sin beyond
Reckoning
Our lives
Yours and mine
Loveless
And entangled
Your legacy
You kicked love
From me
A can on the street
I let you
Submission
No rival to obsession
Inevitable
Writ large
No escape
Scrambling for words
Constructs, poems
A scrabble board
Of possibility

Transfigured mundane
That ordinary
Finding words
To describe
Feeling or none
After your death mother
They ask
How do you feel?

Nothing
Nothing much
Holding back
The weltering regret
The could haves
In small case letters
Your dreams polymorphic
If your father hadn't
You would state emphatically
I could have been
The head of Macy's or...
Grand dreams
Head struck whipped
To set you straight
Elation to despair
Bi-polar mother
Mental illness not yet respectable
You could have been its reigning queen
Sacrificed on the prayer shawl of mean reality
Life too small for you're anguished reaches

Looking back
First gasp of air
The terrible moment
Minutes in
I trembled
You were
The enemy to fear
Dear mother
And fear I did
And live I did
Hidden
Blinding smiles
To disguise
The contrite
The small sad
To describe
Unbearable
Truth
Not to be
Penetrated
Never revived
The mordant
Partially comatose
Child
Swaddled

In your manipulations
Your lies
Love skirts
Half lives
Mine passed by
You had
More of life
Than meets the eye
Mother
Sidestepping
Obsession
To kick up heels
And live a little
Choking down
Mean words
Distemper
Split off
From my typing finger
Hard to let them go
Destiny
Banal
Pathetic
Creepy
Madness
A construct
Or manipulation
Aftermath of tirade
Apologia, mea culpa
Serpent's pronged tongue
Pity and remorse
I am human
To err is human
Forgive divine (Alexander Pope)
Recounting incessantly
Multifarious good deeds
On our behalf taken to account
A tithe calling forth our devotion
Gratefulness metered counting off
Proliferating good works
Counting off jellybeans in a jar

Immigrant's ship
Newly anchored
On foreign soil
Budding
Stolen

Interned
Lapses
Of the familiar
Married our father
For comfort
Cleaving
To immigrant
Meanness
Misery
Dying dreams
Lived in the
Garbled tongue
Yiddish
Cleft to sound
Frozen in time
Desire too great
Shame gravity
Baker's daughter
Ambition thwarted
Mordant
Clamoring
For the familiar
Grabbing our father
Sighting him conducting
He had scooped ice cream
She knew him
His family lived behind
The candy store
Perfect coupling
Baker's daughter
Candy storeowners son
She was so pretty
He was so handsome
His soul
Limned with musical notations
She veering
Toward madness and distemper
And so it was
July to July
The baker's daughter
Had a daughter
So began
Our grief
A ritual slaughter
A mother
Holding to light

The quicksand
Demise of her dreams
In this suckling
Searching infant mouth
Collision
Collusion
Confusion
Cacophony
Discordant
Atonal
Chance music
This dance
Of mother and child
Sins abundant
In the first hold
Suckling
Stone-cold tits
Shrieks
Of pain
Infant lips
Brushed
Dry ice scorched tit
Source of food
Source of grief
Hours old
Turned out
Scoured your face
Eyes filled with
Hatred and fear
Wild thing
Mother dear
I saw torment
I saw crazed looks
I saw my destiny
Dear Mother
Arms stiffened
Longing inflamed
Our lives
Along the great divide
My flesh, my secrets
My dreams devoured
My life feeding you
Hunger obsessive
Starved lost soul

Time elapsed
Surviving
Salvaged
Felt at peace
In sculpture studio
Tools carving
Chipping away
Carefully selected
Pieces of marble
Stone carving
Mothers and daughters
Shaping over and over
Maternal love culled
From deep in the stone

You tracked me
Daily
Reporting
Foredooming
Cracked
Egg yolk and goo
Stories, warnings
In the third person
Dragged off the pages
Of tabloid
And scandal sheet
Statistics shared
Unsparing
And I quote
*"Divorced women
With for children
Live in greatest poverty
Kill themselves
In greater number!"*
Harbinger
Of things bad
Bard of despair
And ruin
Cheshire cat mother
Licking chops
Needing rip me from
Her obsessed diseased
Mind dreams, soul
What revenge
What *eye for eye*
From a Jewish daughter

Caught in the trap
The venom
The madness
Of a women possessed
On the tenterhook
To wipe me from her life

As student nurse
She slid food
Inside the enclosure
Holding an insane girl
Finger paintings
With her fecal matter
Over the walls
Cave paintings
Her story
Archaic arcane
Mother's fascination
Her dread
Mixing up identities
Could have been
Her instead
Pushing beyond panic
To suicide
To quiet the dread
Tactical handoff
Imprinting on me
The face the destiny
Of the atoning mad girl

Dipping beyond
Small sorrows
I wanted to
Plunge a knife
Deep into my uterus
Wrists, too impersonal
Too *waspy goyishe*
Symbolism
Just not there
Triangulation
Ran in Jewish families
Daughters trampled on
Husbands mournful
And silent
Too close
To steerage

The glare of impotence
The beam of *nothing good*
Will ever come of you
You were
Always in heat
Always in the chase
Morsels of discontent
Doom and gloom
Your weapon
Invasive parasite
We lived
In mutual torment
Mutual discontent
Our daily bread

Suicide and death
I lived
And wished
To be dead
Beyond taunts
Trickery
I found
Birds and trees
Orange skies
Mornings' light
Purple and pink
As the sun
Dipped beyond
The horizon
And the moon
Moved into place
Glints of orangey
And pink lights
Riotous color
Defining, delineating
A calendar of days
And despite Biblical Law
Unto the third generation (Exodus: 25)
Loved my children
Found in motherhood
My moment of life
Not to be taken
By mother's crowbar hewing mouth

Our lives
So slight so small
We lived
She and I
In the margins
Of contrition
In the end
Banal travesty
She is dead
Time to release
Her hold on me
I saw her ashes
Spilled into
The Atlantic
I watched
My brother
Hand her off
I need
To let go
I see
My father's
Sorrowful face
Displaced person
Internment
In his own home
She had murderer's blood
On her hands
Wrenching him
From the clutch
Of death
At her hand
He lived
A stranger
In the end
Daddy
I forgive you
Her torment
Trickster that she was
Bound you
To her
You sacrificed
My brother and me
How could you
Have left her with us
He asked you at 21
I said *She was not*

A good mother to us
I don't disagree you said

Weeks before he died
We moved our father out
To a friend's home
She welcomed three or four
Older forgetful guests
Wine in crystal glasses
Irish stew and song
Swigging Irishmen
They took you in
And sang to you
Irish lilts, chants
Celtic song
Death is your
Most important moment
The Irish host
Sang mournfully
Soulfully
As she held
Your wilting hand
The *Talmud* says
Honor thy (Exodus:12)

Sundays
The day of reckoning
She is dead
Dad you are dead
None of it
Makes sense
Forlorn
Daughter
Of Sundays
Sad small musings
I want to be happy
Raise my fist
At the past
Lift up
My fuck you third finger
And move on
Toward my 70's

This Sunday
I am happy
Listening

To *Klezmer Soul*

Not wanting

To kill myself

I do not want

To be dead

This Sunday

The room

Rings with song

A Jewish soul

Leaps about inside

How deep

How timeless

The hour before

The hour past

Finally, finally

I am fully here

This Sunday

At last, at last

Time squandered

No more mythmaking

No odyssey

Past tense

Mother took one look

At my squishy

Blood drenched face

Oozing with afterbirth

And put a stake in me

She died at 92

I am beyond 70

Symbiotic unions

Like ours

To be mocked

And disparaged

Knowing better

Relenting

The easier path

I took the road

Too often traveled

Coming to final breaths

Acknowledging

Tragedy

Too high a calling

For this small

Depiction caricature

Of a mother

And a daughter
And their
Immigrant spent
Ritualized slaughter.

Naomi Barber
January 2010

When the Pronoun *I* soars

When the pronoun *I* soars
Not as in selfish *I*
Or only *I*
But in
I am alive
Alive!
I got carded
He recounts
With fierce pride
He being my
Youngest child
Twenty-one
With an ID
To show it
As he does often
At bars or at
Atlantic City casinos
Lots older people
Playing video games
He shares
I get carded
All over the place,
I get carded a lot

He died three times
In operating rooms
And resuscitated
By struggling team
It is his *I*
That soars
Nothing for granted
Life plump and present
His *I* the one of Sartre
The *I*

Looking for relevance
As it searches
For hosts
In a myriad of rooms

There is only one day left, always starting over: it is given to us at dawn and taken away from us at dusk.

Jean-Paul Sartre

Naomi Barber
February 2010

The Berlin Wall

The Berlin Wall
Changed it all
Sealed my fate
Weak kneed
Love mixed in
With concrete slabs
And hollow blocks
Love sealed
In the wall
I erected
When you
Left me
Called back
Into the military
Reservist
In starched
Pressed uniform
You walked in
Surprising me
Leaving in two days
A motorcycle ride
To Gloucester
And Rockport

Days after you left
My father's hand
Cupping my own
Sent you
A *Dear John* letter

I should have
Known better
Father's hand
Guiding mine
My breath and life
Resided in his
Sanction
Stirred the *Electra*
To submission
And obeisance
Counter foil
To devouring wife
Looking back
She may have
Destroyed my spirit
But you father
You crushed my heart
Killers both of you
Only you were
The one to be forgiven

Just days
Before the call back
You Dad advised
*If I couldn't live
Without John
That I had to
Move in with him*
Not a word
About marriage
The prompt given
I was packing
Gathering up
Belongings
Then you appeared
Suddenly
Soldier at my door
Had my father
Anticipated
The callback
Did he mean
To challenge
My fealty
Was he getting
Dangerously close
To overtaking me

In my most nubile
Innocent beauty
Giving me
A chance
To escape
His hot breathe
His soft sad eyes
Calling from his needy
Manhood and heart

The tripping foot
A political event
The Berlin Wall
Sealing my fate
Overtaking me
Pen in hand
Loyal Electra
Submissive
I didn't protest
Gagged as letter
Slipped into mailbox
The Wall came down
But never for me
I lived the half-bride
Tethered to his side
I lived in the shadows
Compromised
Daughter bride
Couldn't wait
For the true love of my life
Couldn't escape
"I would have died for him. Why aren't I dead?"
Weep over and over listening
To *The Umbrellas Of Cherbourg*

Father was this our
Consensual incest
You owned my heart
You guided my hand
Writing the words
That killed
My soldier off
You suggesting
I live with him
If I couldn't
Live without him

Way past your death
Father I still long
For the soldier
At my door
When I signed
That fateful letter
Dear John
Electra's fate sealed
Faithful to a father
Kept me
Living forever
Without my man
Barely alive
In your shadow

Naomi Barber
February 2010

First Day of Life Without John

First day of life
Without John
Fifty years
Not more than
Inches from my mind
Embedded in my heart
It's beat and it's flip
Lens in focus
Heartbeat skips
When I was twenty-one
I said goodbye
To John
Father's prod
At thirty-one married
With two children
Death threats
For unfaithfulness
Met John
In Washington DC
Found his number and
For two or three months
John was pulled
From the sanctity

Of my imagination
Lovemaking
Above Rock Creek Park
Marrying Diane, he informed
She and I
We make love
Each night
Sex is central to us
By omission
And never was
For you
Too frozen
Sex a remote gesture
Weeping
I knew
I had lost forever
My moonbeam
A cherished amulet
At sunrise
John always
The secret
Moving me through
Each day

After each divorce
Tried to reach him
Google no bio
But an address
When Mother died
Sent him copies
Of two photos of us
She called it
Nibs's first love
I call it
Nibs's first and
Only love
By return mail
Three lines
Thanks for your thoughtfulness
Sorry about your loss
My wife and I see
A college friend
A former date
Another tossed off
Sweetheart
When I thought

Time was limitless
Possibilities infinite
And that
There would
Always be John
Closing with
Glad you are well

Best wishes, John

With that
Impersonal goodbye
Letting me know
He was alive
And married
And asking me
Not to write again
John today
You finally died
Though when
The phone rings
Now and then
I expect the hear
You say, *hello Naomi*
Ironically
Before you left
To monitor
The Berlin Wall
I was open
To learn love
The *Kama Sutra* way
It was possible
For me to become
A woman for you
To love and
Want to keep
Glad you are well

Best wishes, John

With that
A dream's death
For fifty years
Longed for someone
Always just beyond
My unripe bodies
Grasp and reach

Naomi Barber

February 2010

Mourning John Noble

Don't quite know how
To do this
Say goodbye
To a wisp a thin thread
A life without a beginning
And without an end
Luminescent moment
Love at first sight
At eighteen
On a college stairwell
There you were
The skies parted
My heart fell
Under the spell
Of your lovely blue eyes
Your blinding smile
Soon I will be seventy
John you a few more
You're carefully
Worded letter
The gist
I am here
With my wife
You are glad I am well
Signing off
With an impersonal
Best wishes, John

Even under
You're confident
Studied hand
My body couldn't
Come to life
You would now find
A body unafraid
Resonant with passion
A woman with desire
Sensuality in fingertips
I came to life John finally
If solitary and alone

You once slapped my face
More tap than hit

As if to break a torment
A temper tantrum
A mantra, *my mother*
My problems with my mother
Banned forbidden
Language forsaken gladly
Until I cancelled you out
With that fateful letter
Returned to *problems with mother*
A matter of life and death

Bringing you up to date
Suffered the bruising betrayal
Of two marriages gone bad
The first you help
To guide me out of
Without a promise
To marry me
John I have become
A woman for you to love
Dressed in *New York City* black
I wake again and again
Without you
Hour's days filled
With your absence
I can't go on I'll go on (Samuel Beckett)
Life's savory mysteries
Life's savory ironies
Fifty-two years beyond eighteen
The bride for you
Dressed in widow's mourning

Naomi Barber
February 2010

MY GOLDEN NOTEBOOKS (DORIS LESSING)

The Books of Words I Carried Around

The words
Carried around
Truths
Wrenched
From me
Perforce
Words
Eating away
Silenced
Not an option
Unwritten
Unexpressed
Words
Dangerous parasitic
Gnawing my insides
Words
Carted around
In Golden Notebooks
Boxes of them
All shapes sizes vintage
Dating back
Multiple years
Of mad darkened days
Words ineluctable vaporous
Bleeding the valve
Radiating out
The heat the pain
Overtaking
Unremitting despair
An after-splash
Of ancient pogrom
Unto the next generation (Psalm 71:18)
I was victim
Of a mother's displacement
She and I free-floated
In countries of our making

The notebooks bled the wound
Hidden in sweaters and underwear
Poet of drawers and secret stealth self
Crossover pact for symbiotic rages

Never dared moved your loaded gun
Left in bedside drawer always ajar
Nested wrapped in muslin
In cutout pages of rare book
Finally took my notebooks
The battered unrevealed self
To an undisclosed location
That after you poked around
Reading a few random pages
Didn't know you were that sad that unhappy
Wanting to do yourself in, he said
Husband who kept me fearing him

He blamed my troubled mind
For needing to leave him
Suicide wishes metaphoric
Poetic turns I took
Secrets I told myself
Expressions of despair
My emotional draught
Stared back at me
Nesting in past troubles
Confronted my anguish
In my *Golden Notebooks*
Disintegrated into solipsistic misery
To kill myself or move beyond
Children powerful antidote
Or excuse pushed to live
Step away from
The mausoleum of misery
That was our home
My found words
Became a weapon to bludgeon
Quoting abridged
Depictions of my sorrow
My riff on death and self-destruction
Procurer of taunts and upheaval
My riptide ruminations
Used feverishly against me

My husband essayist chronicler
Exploiter bloodsucker supreme
The derivative of the politic moment
Plunged me into unremitting self-doubt
Crazy spells recurring driving you
To this desperate act leaving me

He claimed in divorce papers
And in his novel *Marriage Voices*
His literary depiction of my death wishes
Explicating reasons for leaving him
A ritualistic suicide
My inner turmoil
Cleaved a peculiar power
Shearing through him
A sixth sense aroused
Beneath her snivels and wails
Existed a woman
Who could walk out on him
You are the State of Israel!
He informed me
On a trip to the holy land
A *Trojan Woman* within
Found me new stature
The bully broke his code
Threatening an irrevocable action
Fear of being revealed exposed
Disrobed as pathological narcissist
A predatory person
With unnerving proclivity
To sexual perversity
The truth my words the notebooks
The time had come for me to run
Escape the brutal menacing hands
The glint of wedding ring
The pistol pointing

Finally ready to escape
The home left untouched
Continuity at all costs maintained
I was gone
The home stayed the same
Everything in its rightful place
As after a death
That is how I found
The wherewithal to leave
Cleave the maniac
To stitched *samplers* reveries
Still fists shook
He railed and ranted
Stole our daughter
From a friend's house
But ultimately

He let the marriage die
He needed to go on
With his life
As if nothing much
Had changed
Just the children
Sliced into bits and pieces
Weeks days hours minutes
Suicide no longer an option
Even in poem and word
For my court ordered timeslot
Had to be completely present

Left with symbolic totems
Of an identity shaken loose
Cello piano clothing
Le Creuset red *French* oven
The children now to live
On the dangerous precipice
Of schedules and disruption
I brought *Golden Notebooks*
To our new home filled with
Hammocks and red geraniums
Keeping them near if still
Among sweaters and underwear
The damage the dislocation
Historic inevitable
And still family history troubles
How and when to move beyond
Betrayal and despair
When the time to leapfrog fear
To an unabashed reckoning with love

Naomi Barber
February 2010

Never to Return
Rebalancing
Story Needed to be Told

At eighteen stopped dead in my tracks
On a stairwell at Antioch College
Love at first sight that was it
No doubt about it
You were in love yourself
With Susan and each time
She moved away from you
You came to me, we even
Stayed together above
Com's bar and restaurant
In Yellow Springs, Ohio
A Nightingale Sang...
Love never consummated
Heads sent to spinning
We kissed and held each other
You blessed god for me
A nightingale sang...
And then I fled, left Antioch
Deep into the night
Not even telling my parents
Said to friends it was to escape
Get away from you
That was not the truth
I was afraid I would flunk out
Get found out, passing as a student
When I was a girl
Who just wanted to die
So tired of hiding in her own skin
Staying hidden, I left to stay alive
Just to stay alive, you found me
In an Emerson College dorm
Alighting there for a semester
Before moving on to Boston University
Curdling impulses death wishes impinged
Turmoil feverish counter voice dimmed
Running along the Hudson River
On a family visit to NYC found me
Screaming, *help me! help me!*

You without waiting for a response
Sent me a plane ticket

It was football fall season
At the University of North Carolina
Where you were now a graduate student
We went to a game arms entwined
The crowd chanted, *look at those hippy lovers*
At night we went to a black bar
And then we loved each other
By a wood furnace
No one knew where I was
But then, I was with you
And in the few short years to follow
Each time I had a new boyfriend
You would ride up unexpectedly
On your motorcycle and whisk me away
When I was twenty-one, on my birthday
Finally we or rather I submitted
And our love was consummated
The next day we went to Rockport
On your rented motorcycle
The bride of night became the bride of light
A light shined through me
Burning rays of unfettered sun
Seemed dim next to my glow, god John
How I loved you, how I loved you

After college graduation
You no longer part of my life
Having disposed of you
With a *Dear John* letter
Dictated by my father
While you were recalled
A soldier at the Berlin Wall
I planned a trip to the Southwest
To live with the Navajos
Put an ad on a Cambridge bulletin board
Asking for a driving partner it was playful if seductive
Drew a dashing Frenchman with a little Citroen
Looked like a beach car or jeep
When he showed up Father pursed lips said *No*
Determined set an alternate course
Hours later I was on a Greyhound to Albuquerque
Proud to have kicked back
Horried that my father still held such sway

Arriving in Albuquerque stayed with
My mother's oldest sister

Rebecca and her husband Bernie
Advised by the psychiatrist years before
Requesting a recounting of my mother's childhood
From her sister some twenty years older
Describing in excruciating exquisite detail my mother's behavior
Asked if my depiction seemed plausible or familiar
She was wild, threw temper tantrums, wouldn't swallow food
We were all unnerved scared frightened by her
Oh I responded tears rushing the gutted damn unplugged
I held to the belief that with the crowning of my head
She became mad frenzied wild cold stiff-armed unyielding
My very first moments held an incontrovertible power
I was a bad seed a monster a witch sorceress
Turning a bookish woman of passion and erudition
Into a crazy maniac tantrum throwing child hating mother
My aunt trembled unburdened by the unconscionable secret
Reality catapulted me to a new sense of power
An aura of confidence a mythic urgency
The family no questions asked lent me their car, a convertible
And dressed in a strapless summer dress headed out
Yet unhinged and unmoored from that fateful *Dear John* letter
I set out with a new boldness a new indomitability
This was a personal odyssey the world limitless and I fearless
I moved a warrior toward my twenty-second birthday
For a brief moment I owned my life
The *Dear John* letter in every breath as I moved beyond grief
Agony gnawed dug in and in this new dawn
The moment would surface as a sorrow beyond regret

Coming to Window Rock Arizona my ultimate destination
The capitol of the Navajo Reservation
Heart-felt expressions of love and friendship
Welcomed me to the Navajo Nation
Ultimately finding a Navajo family
Who hearing of my interest
Invited me to stay with them
Their family Hogan's at the lip of *Canyon de Chelly*
From the moment I arrived a re-imagined self
Felt unselfconsciously at home
The unfamiliar eerily familiar
Finally part of the family I dared longing for
As I rightful member of the Yazzi Morgan's
I learned to clean out innards of prairie dog
Make fried break, card wool and roll cigarettes
There in desert a vision I would stay marry
The oldest son Patrick an accomplished rodeo cowboy

Card wool, weave rugs, let my hair grow to forever
Time closed in, this seemed right, my soul found home
A propitious accident on barbed wire
While at a rodeo watching Patrick
Had me taken abruptly to Window Rock and the hospital

Father sent a ticket for a return to New Jersey
The moon's light menaced as I roiled and crumbled
Splayed a defeated father's grabbing hand crushing
My fateful inevitable departure
An inhuman cry rose up
Meteoric fueled anguished hopeless
Quieting I found John in a constellation of stars
He had loved, really loved me, me!
Fate brought me back to Newark limp and defeated
Rote motions had me back at Boston University
Dating random men loving each beyond recognition
Parents forewarn if you keep up this frantic dating
You will find you don't need to marry and no one will want you
This prescient warning to unsettle further scuttling a lost self
Then came Ben after one or two dates we decided to marry
Within three weeks, families all met, the wedding date set
And there we were exchanging vows

Ben and I built a life two incomplete souls
The holy grail of early-married life lost a pregnancy
Moved to Switzerland and then England
Returning almost three years later
Three weeks after we returned to Boston
I gave birth to Jeremy and then again
A fearless power lifted in me
My breasts rich with milk
Completely and defiantly connected to my baby
Glory be to the newborn king, I sang
Here in a clinic ward with other sadly dissolute mothers
She, my mother, tried to drag his mouth off my tit
She threatened that I would be less attractive
A first an innuendo eluding to god forbid sex
Her words frenzied a frantic obsession
With breast feeding her hands grasping
But I was a mother with that becoming
The me of me! *I am who I am!* Biblical uprising!
Backward glimpses of the girl who fell in love
On an Antioch stairwell
A second child came, Rebecca
But rumblings of fear and discontent surfaced

Ben threatened me with a certain death
He had a loaded gun without a safety catch
Just in case I was ever not true to him
His philandering okay
His adultery served me well
Sex with him unsettling repugnant
I was stilled water
As unresponsive as a drugged wife
Settled so deep inside myself
Ben said I had a very low sex drive
I would say it was obstinately repressed

When I was thirty-two on a Washington consulting job
I looked John up in the phone book
And there he was, there was that voice
There was my heart regaining its beat
We met at the train station when I was on my way home
It was his thirty-fifth birthday, he said
He asked why I sent that *Dear John* letter
He shared the pain he felt reading it
Informed his wife walked out leaving him with two sons
Over the next several months we would meet
The first time dressed in closely fitting jeans
A snug black turtleneck and black boots
Hey there, Mrs. Tough Tits, he greeted me
Once he had me paged at Union Station
My name in full throttle, *come to the information*
He wanted me to meet him at his house
The humor and mortification not escaping me
This time I was in Washington for three days
After work we rode on his motorcycle
Through the Virginia countryside
Stayed at a friend's house
Above Rock Creek Park overlooking waterfall
We made love, *thank god* again for me
The boy who lived in the house appeared in the morning
His name was Jeremy, ouch, a piquant reminder
Defiant wife risks murder to be with John
We have dinner at his friends' house
I couldn't move from his lap arms around his shoulders
Goodness what his friends must have thought
They knew I was married with children
And they knew about John's life and situation

I told John all about my sordid and difficult marriage
Where murder was not out of the question

He took me to his home showed me photos of his two boys
About the same age as Jeremy and Rebecca
His car was a jumble of old papers and beer cans
His divorce had him a little disheveled and misplaced
He asked to come to New York to see Rebecca and Jeremy
This while Ben was away sitting on each child's bed
Sharing the wonder I felt this all seemed so crazily right to me
On the last trip to Washington we had that serious talk
First an anecdote for me about a *Good Humor* man
Who had murdered everyone around him
When he withdrew a gun from among the popsicles
It was if I was given permission
And a little shove to leave Ben
Affirming a potential catastrophe lurked
This brief love affair stolen rendezvous
Gave me the pluck the courage to end my marriage
Had John asked me, I would have taken the children
And moved in with him immediately
No hesitation, no *Dear John* letter to follow
But then he struck a blow to my heart
Still aquiver in the aftermath
He told me that he was going to marry Diane
That she liked sex as much as he did
And that sex was and would be central
To their lives, that they liked making love each night
And with that he shut the door
On any possibility of our meeting again
Back to NYC, parsing myself into hidden diaries
My grief overwhelming I pleadingly ask
What is sex for? to the therapist
A twelve year old was less innocent
She smirked like a cat licking grizzle
With that she chased froze petrified
The woman in me into eternal cold storage

I got the divorce clinically right
Keeping everyone whole as possible, as the therapist suggested
This was some eight years after John
I was forty and on my birthday sipped champagne and ate caviar
On the roof garden at my new brownstone residence
On the Upper West Side, no furniture
Just geraniums and hammocks, loft beds for the children
Along came a man a pimp a whoremaster really
Who promised sex, lots and lots of sex
I told myself it was the tonic to keep me young
To finally scuttle doom the sex repressed part of me

How crazy how misguided how self-destructive
A *poseur a cipher* as Jeremy referred to him
An insistent persistent nobody anybody
Man on the move, *I am on my way up*
And you down, he would say over and over
And tried to get me to have a facelift at forty-two
He was eight years younger and each day
He would find a way to remind me
How he was surging up and I down
Of course his meteoric climb was on my shoulders

Finally he brought a woman home
He met In Brazil a woman of many orgasms
And I won grounds for another divorce
But then the inevitable emptiness
I a woman now fifty-eight just jowl and sulk
Withered ruined by a hapless search for sexuality
On and off would look for John
Wrote to Antioch and asked to be put in touch
And then on a leisurely Google found him
Living in Bethesda with Diane his wife
A thirty-year Odyssey, a preoccupation
Searching for the unobtainable great love of my life
Even to a San Francisco Street about five years ago
Believing that I saw him in moments
The mirage the image vanished
My mother died, and among her things
Photos of John and me *look, my brother*
Shouted out, *wonder what happened to him?*
I have had those same photos in a frame
Above my bed, at any rate, I took them
And made a copy and with a simple note
Dear John, mother died at 92, found these,
Thought you would like to see them,
Not even four days passed when
It came in an envelope no return address
To *Naomi Weiss Barber*
He thanked me for my thoughtfulness
Said he was sorry about my mother
And said that he and his wife saw another
Antiochian frequently, someone who had coincidentally
Been a guest at my home and whom I dated
However briefly while I was at Antioch
And then he wrote, *I am glad you are well.*
Best wishes, and signed his name, *John*
With that I came to life again

Just knowing he was in the world
He knows where he can reach me probably won't
But when does an Odyssey end otherwise?
Finally my dream and I are one
I am in love I was in love I never stopped being in love
At nearly seventy I found the bride in me
I re-found her as if back at the dawn of first love
Today, this day, I am happy
Hosanna to spring its flower and fragrance
A rebirth of bud and bird song
I know whom I am where I belong
John thank you for finally letting me find you
If without your actual presence
Yes there was a love a guy who loved me
If now solitary and soulful
There are still sunrises to see
Poems to read Yeats Auden Tennyson
Soon I too will sail off to my **Byzantium*
Following the arc of sunsets
Regard a world in which John was lost to me
At seventy I recite out loud
Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all
And like a man in wrath the heart
Stood up and answer'd 'I have felt.'
So runs my dream, but what am I?
An infant crying in the night
An infant crying for the light
And with no language but a cry (The Way of Soul, Alfred Lord Tennyson)
At twenty I severed cut off
Ended my relationship with John
And now find it
Just so sad, so damn sad

*An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium. W.B. Yeats Sailing to Byzantium

Naomi Barber
February 2010

We Couldn't Find Our Footing in Love

We couldn't find our footing in love
Overlay, history's measure
Love never to take root
The soil long depleted
Counterpoint blasts of love
Moving hearts
Fine Tourneau workings
Held precipice
No way for toe or foothold
Expanse the range
History's lovers
Cave drawings to Sappho poems
Picasso's twisted eyes of brides
De Kooning women's mangled shapes
Internal canvas bleeding
History bound our feet
Imagination reaching back
Tortoise basking
On Galapagos beach
Just beyond reach
Footing no ledge could hold
Fate's torment
Love a child's self-invention
Scaling Himalayas
Alighting the airless sky
Broken spirit
Love imagination misfires
Love's dreamer warp
Spun tempestuous tumultuous
Loves blight
Moving finally into the dead zone
Every step led to being alone
Restless heart, frightened heart
Desirous heart, denied heart
Death can't come a moment too soon

Naomi Barber
February 2010

My Time, My Day, My Way

No longer to worry about
Avoiding arguments or causing them
To constrict time, shave hours off days
No longer to worry
About avoiding sex
Starting a fiery argument
Turning back on adversary
To whom I promised
To love and to cherish, till death us do part
Garbled words foolhardy sentiment
Divorce decree severs
No longer anyone to fend off
No longer anyone to love either
My day my time my way
How did love get so tangled up?
Biblical blight
Overhang of history
My day, my time, my way
No longer to hide brown spots
Leopard runs on aging wrists
No longer to hide bald spots
Or missing teeth
No longer to deny 1940 birthday
My time, my day, my way
Handicapped at the starting gate
But I have a day to shape
No longer to avoid anything or anyone
Except old me lurking
Ready to trick unnerve
Ready to create doubt
Ready to keep in place
My time my day my way
To shape stamp out suffocate

Naomi Barber
February 2010

.....

Sacred Covenant

Found son
Boy of broken body
From the first
Couldn't tolerate milk
Pediatric shots
Sent shock waves
Through his body
Tremors and fevers
No genetic memory
Of inoculants
Indigenous pure inviolate
His intestines
From the first
In rebellion
Boy of broken body
Transported transplanted
Holy ghost host resists
Mother abandons at birth
Better life court papers read
Boy taken from ancient
Primal rain forest
No medical history
No personal history
No history
But gleaned
From *National Geographic's*
Or occasional *NY Times* stories
Scraps of information
Tidbits from official documents
Mother sixteen from village
Nestled by the *Tropic of Capricorn*
Redolent echoing *Iguassu Falls*
Predominantly *Guarani Indian*
Living amidst these Paraguayan lands

Mother sixteen
Abandons son at birth
Adoption papers read
Delivered by midwife
Boy of broken body
Brought into temporary foster care
Retrieved on the day he was nine weeks

By post menopausal mother of forty-seven
Boy of broken body
Grafted to new family
Decisions have consequences
Time reckless unpredictable
Noble deed primordial implications
Birth by decree irrevocable
Suddenly to grasp
A sorrow beyond resolve
To love beyond constancy
Unfathomable
Child without discernible
The nothingness of his past
Information's blank
Plays upon her insides
To clasp infant son
Boy of broken body
His story told
In files stuffed
With medical case records
Documenting his course
Years in the dead beat of sweat
Of excruciating violating pain
He now twenty-five
A mother's arms hold on
With an invisible
Interminable clasp
Child not of my body
Child of my heart
How large how tenacious an embrace
Does an adoption ceremony make?

I know family history
Ancestry of pogrom displacement
Of grand survival
Fumes of *Sarin Gas*
Permanently line nostrils
Reconstituted evidence
Of god's celebratory choosing
Raise a people to the level
Of ennobled suffering
A touchstone to shape meaning
Boy of broken body keeper of
Imagination without genealogy
Family history an evolving narrative
Fiction at its most intense and necessary

Manifold medical histories
Documenters of body's imploding insides
Medical vocabulary redounds
Condition verging on catastrophic disastrous
This the soupcon of metaphor and poetry
Boy of broken body recounts recitative
I am adopted
I don't know my medical history
Are you feet larger than your fathers?
Playful quip, responds I am adopted
His biography mapped by his body
And its sad tale of disintegrating parts
Dissect metaphorically
Look to lore and history
Herein the impenetrable
Perhaps mythic
Story of colonialism
Its marauders its plunderers
Drawn to his favorite tale of origins
Gleaned from a movie *The Mission*
The narrative as real as palpable
Granite shaped by the Iguassu falls
Boy with broken body
His life story
Documentable verifiable
In cinema **The Mission*

*Note: *The film is set in the 1750s and involves Spanish Jesuit priest Father Gabriel (Jeremy Irons) who enters the South American jungle to build a mission and [convert](#) a Guaraní community to Christianity. The Guaraní community above the perilous Iguazu Falls has tied a priest to a cross and sent him over the falls to his death. Father Gabriel travels to the falls, climbs to the top, and plays his oboe. The Guaraní warriors, captivated by the music, allow him to live.*

*The emissary says, "**Sometimes a surgeon has to cut off a limb to save the patient**"?*

(How insufferably prescient for Boy with Broken Body!)

In the movie with a compelling score by Ennio Morricone as it ends heard:

*The Miserere (have mercy) part of the Catholic Mass of the Dead (the Requiem). The Miserere sung by a single boy soprano—one of the surviving children—as is viewed the destruction of the mission at the end of the film. *The Mission: The Film and Its Music* -Elizabeth F. Barkley
Foothill College*

Sorrowful pre-emptive information
Anthropological canonized tracts
Fortuitously retrieved
In *The Mission*
Guaraní Indians relic culture
Held in community and song
Jesuits enchanted as they plundered
Found son keeper
Of ancient predisposition
His body scripture
Tablet of ancestry
Jesuit proselytizers
Adorned in sacred vestment
Anointing Christianizing
Plundering custom and song
Disrupting destabilizing
Commingled swag and song
Shreds of golden scripture
Savage rapine strung like laundry
Along granite overhang
Iguassu Falls overruns

Boy of broken body
Festering volcanic rumblings
Lava of sin and degradation
His body host
Indigenous dislocation
Overflowing sewage
Exploitation lifted
From Jesuit hands
Germinate in diseased body
Imperial god given madness
Sepsis overflows bloodstream
Putrid waters biblical refuse
History's child imploded
Medical history written
Sludge curdles
Beneath the surgeons' scalpel
Residue of biblical text
Proselytizing defiling breaking
Boy of broken body
Abandoned at birth
Budding in him
An archaeological site

Ancient ruin dug out
Taken in sludgy clumps
Intestines feet long
Lay on a surgical floor
The body narrative
Histories ruthless imperialism
Festered in child of promise

Boy of broken body
Sacred soul sustained
Jesuit book of prayer
More Hieronymus Bosch than Jesus Christ
And you the choice of my confused heart
Anointed sacred archetype mother
And I extracting indigenous child
Imperial maternal hunger displaced
Anthropologists wax poetic
Guaraní tribe of full throats
Architecture of mutual trust
Gathered my rainforest baby
Loved him as I had the others
This child inflamed by past sin
Held in healing mother hands
The provenance, my constancy
Mother Courage stalwart warrior
When your eyes dimmed
Death and I did our dueling
Alive yet this sacred
Child of the moribund
Stomach bulging with contaminants
Poop streams through
A contraption set on your tummy
An artifact of medical sovereignty

Now you gallivant the City streets
Darkened alleyways and bars
Taunting fate, predators
Boy of broken body
Succulent nectar of innocence
Still fragrant in you
The sky lost
The innocence of possibility
Yesterday bleeds on tomorrow
I wrap myself in my son's sorrow
Shielding myself, won't hold up
In another foray with death

I live a half or less life
Air eclipsed harder to breathe
Dimmer eyes
Have had my fill of bad things
Struggle to feel optimism
For a natural life cycle
Writ large and small
Only this, for each child
Born of loin or turmoil
History recount for me
That I was in fact and deed
A mother who didn't bleed
The sin of lovelessness *unto the third*
Boy of broken body children born of me
Not to winch a tightened heart
When you remember or think of me

Naomi Barber



A Lifelong Struggle With Hair

Setting the stage or barber chair
Hollowed egg time capsule
Lives fixed *Joseph Cornell* Box
Portraiture in cutout and object
Diorama life existed just so
Glacial moments
Haze burns off from sight
Heart convulses eyes avert

I am inside out
Mannequin in upsweep of despair
Maelstrom of unresolved emotion
Moved in motion to her lips and words
Elliptical rebounding to her
Puppetry not mothering
Now live in brackish moments of solitude
Wading the squeamish waters
The freakish horror of a life squandered
Inevitable prefigured preordained
Time filigreed dappled shadowing
By driven obsessed mother
She held onto me python tight
Love in all its manifestations
To be snuffed out
Possibility of a heart's flutter
Exasperated her inner furies
She died at ninety-two
Too late to banish or release
My heart from her pull
With commensurate birth cry
I squalled and died
Nourished intermittently
Engorged tits cracked nipples
Offered up only *cold stone soup* - *Stone Soup Marcia Brown*

Hologram moments
Affixed to ringlets
Curly locks Jewish hair
The tangled battleground
In Joe Fanelli's barbershop
Respite and revenge
Snip it barber Joe
Pull my face
Out into the open
She slamming head
With wire hair brush
Water soaked screaming
Why did you do this to me?
Your hair was never this curly
I was three
Authenticating trauma - *Marina Abramovic*

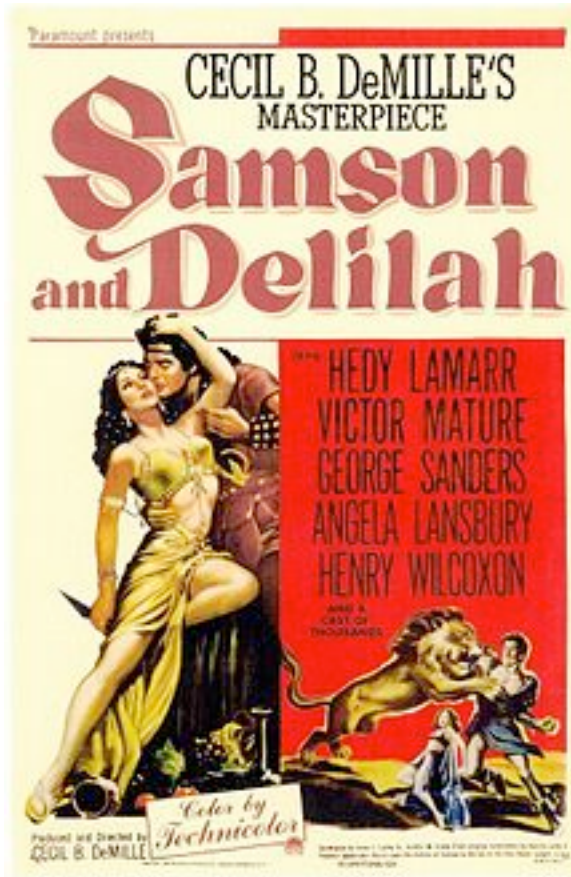
Marina Abramović has been brushing her hair for one hour. She holds a comb in one hand and a brush in the other, methodically untangling and tangling again her long, dark hair. Her stare is blank, a small wince at each knot. The scene is silent except for

the sweeping strokes of brush upon hair, the simultaneous grazing across the scalp and the infinitely small noise of hair follicles breaking in two. Suddenly, she breaks her silence and declares in accented English, "Art must be beautiful. Artist must be beautiful." Klaus Biesenbach Director, MoMA PS1

Marina Abramović, with her tangled hair and bleeding scalp, is a true artist; she performs in loyal servitude for her audience, and she bears the pain and solitude that they cannot. What an Artist Must Be: Art Must be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful (1975) Jamie Lew, UC Davis

Validate excoriate
Fate shaped
Unruly curls
Dead Jewish giveaway
My hair road map
To despair personal failing
Nothing not a hot iron
Note a wire brush
Not *Toni Home Permanent* in reverse
Not *Japanese* hair straightening treatment
Could tame rebel curls
Returning with a vengeance
Jewish curls my pearls
Barber Joe, cut it off
Brief reprieve
Remnant curls
Bowl cut Bob cut
Face protrudes
Assertive boyish
Hair *agoniste*
Style driven
Angela Davis Afro
Veronica Lake with tinted dip
Teen in the '50's
Now well into my '70's
Hair thinning as if on a rampage
Deep side brush-over barely conceals
Tall people can see their reflection
In a life's wretched tangled agony

So Samson told her everything. "No razor has ever been used on my head," he said, "because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man." Samson and Delilah Judges 16



Biblical lore

Hair edifice
Restore resolve
Ringlets a pig's tale
Still they entwine entangle
Animistic hatred
Drove her brushing hand
Wire rooted clasp
Her magic wand
De-Jewing de-fleecing destroying
Life force swept
Onto Joe Fanelli's barbershop floor

Trees move to winter wind and chill
Stand apart look on with wonder
Mirror reflects remnant *Semitic* curls
Solipsistic sorrow
Mother gulped up disavowed *Jonah*
Into the cavern of her darkness
Biblical references told our sorrowful tale
The gospel of hair and its fealty
The allure of *Samson and Delilah*
Restorative and destructive power of hair
Here archetype girl of curly hair
Born of *Diasporic* mother dreaming
If only her hair were straight
She could be the Shiksa bride
Of a rich Goyishe guy to die for

Naomi Barber
February 2010

Graying Couples Kill Me

Graying couples kill me
Just holding hands throws me
Standing in theatre lobby
Talking shoulders touching
Sotto voce revelatory
Imagine behold mattresses
Molded and shaped
By bodies incline and heat
One body in the hollow of the other
A vivid image in my head
My marital beds two of them

Veritable battlegrounds
Fatigue overwhelmed opponents
Driven to opposite corners
Gripping edges of the bed
In desperation
Holding on not to fall off
Imperial marriage
Each side the other end
Of the world
But not far enough
Rage frustration mistrust
Fueled the ever-widening gulf
Torment of mattress and ticking
Never got to even fifteen years
Silver gold platinum anniversaries
Couples toast with breakfast coffee
A day begins
I have my rituals my touchstones
Solitary more truthfully alone
Look on in restaurants movies
On the subway
Beneath easy conversations
Eyes shimmer of last night's
Or morning's *oh's* and *ah's*
The everydayness
An unfathomable miracle for me

Now I am most at home by myself
Lost in the trenchant narrative
The wonder of love its elusiveness
How did love escape get beyond me?
Where Cupid holding his tiny *putti* penis
Venus caressing breast hand on *honey pot*
Graying couples a thing to behold
Graying couples kill me
I fear not death but the dread
Of regret of not stepping up
And saying *yes, yes* and *yes*
The redundant residual conversation
Remembering years of marriage
Strangers estranged enraged
Under midnight a moon's glow
Lovemaking in the crosshairs
Of mattress ticking
Here family history reverberates
Mother so throttled by desire

Flung herself midnights toward furnace fires
Father dragging her back by hair root
Succumb submit death driven love

My body is now dying denied
Lips short-circuited kisses
Confessions of disgust triggered
Married divorced twice over
The vows and disavows
Spoken in monotones
I stand on uncertain legs
Move into mid-seventies
Pick through the spoils of time
Finding no good reason
The why I hid from love
Turned away if sensed near
Too late to rue the *dying day*,
I move toward *Byzantium*
Solitariness has its place
Dyspeptic solipsistic morose
To die alone no one to weep
Body prepared scrubbed clean
Of desire and remorse
Here final clarity vivid
Grateful for the life lived
If at bed's edge holding tight
Time to release slip off
Wilting last moments
Seized by revelation
Love was all love was all

But love that comes too late,
Like a remorseful pardon slowly carried,
To the great sender turns a sour offence.

All's Well That Ends Well Shakespeare

*Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing.
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come
Sailing to Byzantium W.B. Yeats*

Do not go gentle into that good night.

*Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
Though wise men at their end know dark is right.
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight.
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
And you, my father, there on the sad height.
Curse, bless, me now with you fierce tears.
I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

Do Not Go Gentle in That Good Night Dylan Thomas

The glint of truth
Unabashed filtering the moon
Knowing at last finally
What I turned from
What I missed
I sail off somber truths
The final recognition of note
Decomposition decomposing in repose
Knowing yes knowing!

Naomi Barber
February 14, 2010
Valentine's Day

My Second Husband

My second husband
Was a mean mouthed man
Washed over me
Desperate for love
Needy as an infant's mouth
He overtook me
The pretext

I am a good man
Good man indeed
Pimp poseur cipher
His prick notched
With wily conquests
Desperate women
A dime a dozen
I fell in swooned
Spread wide
And once again
Denied died
Becoming bride
NB

We are Jews, Jewish

Mom

A great and profound and brooding yet cathartic poem.
Thanks for sharing.

Jeremy

On predator's paws
Moving toward irrelevance
Building toward nowhere
Existential predicament
Becoming irrelevant with grace
She died, that would be mother
Predator pretender mother
Biologic phenomena
Referred to as,

"Analogous resemblances" or "mimetic analogies,"

(NY Times, "Imitators That Hide in Plain Sight, and Stay alive.")

Henry Walter Bates, author says, "a most beautiful proof of the theory of natural selection."

"Four strategies to avoid being eaten –mimicry; concealment, known as crypsis; the display of warning colors; and masquerading as inedible objects."

Note: "Species can fool predators that have had experience with the objects being imitated."

Elementary my dear Watson – (Sherlock Holmes)

Who is she and who is me?

Which the daughter

Betraying the mother

Mother's last words

Before dying,

Momma be with me

If with crater pressing
The last breathe out of me
Godless I would rather
God be with me
Which daughter's adaptation
Hers or mine
Revisionist
Winding time backward
Last gasp *tabula rasa*
Scrolled back
To infant to clasp
No longer snaggletooth
Daughter
Putting fear of god
In her own mother's
Nectar sweet heart
Prey pray prey pray
Script for dying
Mother
I do not will not
Forgive never
You're astonishing
Composite final
Note of grace
Wiped slate clean
Terrorist relents
Repents reinvents
Forages a beginning
Begging salvation
Psychosis rips
Morphine eclipsed
Breaking through
Spanking new
Someone
She never was
Fog of hospice
Sanctioned sedation
Momma forgive me
Momma I am sorry
Momma hold me
Momma be with me
Mommy mommy mommy

Nausea overcame
I listened
To her death rattle

Rallying call
Predator mother
Illusory incantation
Saying once upon a time
If only I had a daughter
I was four or five
Standing at her side
Predator mother
Shaped by her
Rapacious hunger
Your *Diasporic* appetite
My adaptive compliance
The girl stayed hidden
Within the shaping skeins
Sculptor mother
I was your marble fixation
Becoming that stone cold
Only loving the inanimate
But for my children
Never believing
How remarkable
Breaking through
Biblical warnings
I moved to love
Mothering
While fearing
Holding in contempt
My own mother
Well beyond her last
And final breathe

Her ashes
Topped
White crested waves
At the Jersey shore
Tortured soul
Tumultuous sea
Thrashing ultimately
To the briny banks
Of the old country
The steely hold of *Pogrom*
Fixed like Peter Pan's shadow
On her ever eviscerating skin
In the taper of life
Commemorating memorializing
A dancing *shtetl* Rabbi in full regalia

With tools in hand
Whittling chipping away
A totem to Judaism
In the end ultimately
Scorned rejected

I was a stillborn post-Pogrom baby
I was the tumbling troubling child
Hopscotching square to square
To see where to fit in
The tired reckless immigrant song
Tucked within the bosom
Of my unhappy family
Predatory mother
Comatose father
With munificent *Jesus*-smile

"I want to leave, to go somewhere where I should be really in my place, where I would fit in . . . but my place is nowhere; I am unwanted."
— *Jean-Paul Sartre, Nausea*

I am a Jew
Not self-hating Jew
As she proclaimed
I am a Jew
Who doesn't believe in God
And neither did she
Mother you quipped
Then quoted
God is Not Great (Christopher Hitchens)
Wanting book talk
With Rabbi
On his obligatory hospice visit
You died mother
Wanting your mother back
Wanting to be held and loved
Wanting to be forgiven
By the mother you
Disparaged tyrannized
Every day of her life
Mother I cleaned your glasses
As your eyes went blind
Kissed your forehead
Wished you a *safe passage*
As you died
In the end

Jews of the *Diaspora*
Forsaken and forsaking
Knowing sadly too late
Life was ours alone to shape
God not relevant
God not handmaiden
Our choices decisions
Yours and mine
In the end were demon driven

I am going to outlive myself. Eat, sleep, sleep, eat. Exist slowly, softly, like these trees, like a puddle of water, like the red bench in the streetcar.”
— Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*

Naomi Barber
February 2010

Few Final Words

“True intimacy isn’t about the hydraulics of the flesh. It’s the smell of a certain shampoo in the hair, a passing touch in the kitchen, the taste of cold blueberry soup on a hot summer day, the gentle nostalgia of “Aja” by Steely Dan, and your heart melting at the sight of your wife of 28 years sound asleep after midnight – the murmur of HGTV having lulled her to slumber.” Dana Jennings *NY Times* 2/16/10

Finally to accept
What I missed
Tomorrow’s regret
What tore at my heart
What I have always known
It was my moon for the reaching

My *Bach Suite* on the cello
This the poem before the suicide
This the world lost
Confounded created a bleak *Odyssey*
This a final look back
This the unmade bed
This the night after night after...
Finally to understand
Sappho's hymns, *Dylan Thomas's* love poems
Shakespeare's Sonnets, *Beethoven's Eroica*
The silence the sound
The eeriness of coming to an end
The hours wind down
Time whittled to essential bits
The scent of my shampoo irrelevant
I ate in each season *stone soup* alone
Out of this cloth I must spin gold
I was given breath and limbs
I was given eyes with strong sight
I was given words if they did not scale heights
I was given children
Waiting always waiting
Pile up of time
For nobody for nobody was never there
Love's craving a dirge a hymn
A misty threnody
Finally great love a dream's demise
Lived without the ordinariness
Of a morning brush kiss
Of a squeezed hand lifting a newspaper
Years mounted like land fill
Kept me believing there was still time
Finally finally I know
Time to vacate the dream
Let it fly out leave me
The great love of my life
Lost in the sweep of time
Fearful mistrusting heart
Blinded sight closed up mind
Time to say to the sky the daylight,
The moon the swans on the Meer
Thank you for life for being alive
Finally to cut the chord of discontent
To know finally
Love was mine to find
Love was never mine to find

Stone soup martyrs brew won't do
The shampoo fragrant showers soothe
Bed sheets rare Egyptian threads a splurge
My body relishes the feel
Moves an Olympiad over its spread
Time to say
Words waiting as if on a runway for lift off
Now in anticipation before it is too late
How good it was to be alive
If great love never came
If an enduring love never found me
Finally I know
I was too well hidden in fear

This is my life
This was my life
This will be my life
Thank you thank you thank you
And on a park bench near the Meer

NWB
Mother
Grandmother
Lover of New York

Naomi Barber
2/16/10

Mother, You Look Pale

Mother, you look pale
Laser eyes scrutinize
Concern bubbling up
Epic
Mother begging to love
Eviscerate memory
Evacuate past
Rewrite family story
Never forgive never forget
We are Jews mother
The sanctuary
Our home rife

With hatred madness
Mother don't you remember
You beat your tummy
You pummeled your womb
Growing me
And at my birth
You swore it was I
Who turned away
Turned my back on you
Squalling child
Hungry child
Rejected child
Machination apparition
Daughter denied

Mother you look pale
Lying in hospice bed
Rails up feet cooling up
Eyesight dimming
Screeching like an owl
Morphine madness
Overtaking
Mother
Always competing
For my shred of light
Dread of me
From the first
Daughter droplets old
Drives mother
Into frenzied preoccupation
Demonic obsession blinding pursuit
Her cracked and pulverized tits
Milk soured and curdled at first lick

Mother you look pale
She couldn't help herself
Our father's plea to free her
Of close scrutiny
Over come by revulsion
Her entrance to a room
A veritable fanfare
Father trumpets
Beautiful Bluma look see hear
There she is before us
Our own grotesques mother
Mother heaves hurtles

To confessional
Only minutes old I was afraid
You were too gorgeous
Pleading choked with emotion
I'm sorry for doing you harm
I'm sorry I couldn't stand you
Mother found a daughter to love
Assaulting chunks of marble
Using hand tools
She sculpted and shaped
Mothers and daughters
In multiple iterations
In loving intimate embrace
Mother you look pale
Hush quiet down
No need to confess
Mother you must know
I will never forgive you
I will never forget
The love you killed
Stripped me of
Can not be rekindled

Tumble of jousting words
My psychopath mother
Cursing her way down a street
Mother wedded
To an ancestral cloth of aversion
Intense and orbiting
Her discomfort and dislike of me
Birth fired up this madness
She had me believing
She serene Mary of medieval painting
I brought her this misery
An infant minutes old
Doomed for witchery
Turning mother
Into blood sucking savagery
I learned at twenty-one
From her older sister by twenty years
She was just this crazy and wild
Entire family cowered
Her rages frightening
Mother you look pale
We are at that place
I feel shaken

At your side
And you are dying
What will I do?
When you don't call
Filling me with my daily dose
Of self-doubt and despair
How can I on go one without you?
We are sisters' twins
Solipsistic parasitic beings
Snapped together by self-hate

Mother you look pale
You are sickening me
As I watch you crawl
Back to your mother's lap
She who you tormented
Dishonoring her
Disavowing her
With such heinous
And despicable acts
Barrage of infamy daily
Now desperate
To be reconciled forgiven
Momma be with me
Crying this out
Over and over

Mother you look so pale
At 38 I killed you off
I had no mother I said to myself
I never had a mother I said
And promptly left the husband
Who was the lion to my roar
Married your mirror image
Your body double if a male

Mother you look so pale
Dreading
How you will be
Remembered
Don't worry mother
No way to settle the score
Never to forgive
Never to forget
You drew your last breaths
At ninety-two

I am sixty-nine on last legs
You forfeited motherhood
Remembering how
You battled my Jewish curls
You did this to hurt me
You never had curls before
Pounding my head I was three
Remembering how
You dressed me
In a gold lame fitted dress
With a mink wrap
Fixed my hair just so
Now you look beautiful
You carted me off to a family wedding
Comatose I listened for the *oh* and *ahs*
You were dressed a sultry succulent maiden
Dancing like a voracious, tipsy gypsy
Hora in your feet you led the circle
I stood by and watched blankly
The relatives looked at me
With plaintive eyes
They knew you took
That giggly squirmy girl
Stuffed her into this costume
Stiffened with an agony
No more run away in my feet
I was finally yours
To mold and shape
Born out of you furious inferno
Too meek to escape
From the first, curdling cry
I too saw the danger in your eyes.
Mother you look pale
Remembering
Your words shaped from mid-air
Sulky saturated with your aversion
The sight of me troubling you
You disgust me you said
As I entered the door
It just slipped out
How hard the words
Mother you are pale
You are near dead
Tenderness moves my fingers
To rub your head
Humility before death

Honor the act of dying
While dishonoring you

The epitaph
In memoriam
Shadows on certain clouds
I will never forget
I will never forgive
I will never be whole
Because I can never
Let my hatred of you go

Naomi Barber

What 's More than Hate?

What is bigger than hate
What eases the pain
What bleeds the wound
What is my excuse for you
How could I
I more than hate you
I hate you more than hate
I hate for all time
For all women who hate men
Men who harmed them
Your harm was in overdrive
It broke commandments
Vile man terrible man
And I who chose you
Pathetic and insufferable
Letting a desire for love
Grab for tonic sex
To keep young
Wandered
Into enemy territory
I slipped
Into a predator's mouth
I could have held
My footing in place
I exchanged inner truth
For a quick and skin-deep embrace

Naomi Barber

Death Dying Died Revival

*Just one last time
Just one last time
Just one last time
This is the end station
But I cant move away from you
Songwriters: The Cure*

Death camps
Death promises un-kept
Death vamp
Death temptress
Death baiter

Wishes don't make dreams comes true – Mr. Rogers
Did you dream up death each night?
Did you have to beg to die?
To sleep each night
Death tucked you in
Torso flung furnace door
Contortion feigned
Not to fuck your husband my father
Feverish lovemaking to come
Furnace fire aphrodisiac
Love's seductive dance
Love's come on
Fucking with abandon
Dying reviving revving up
Heaving drenched body
Flickering in midnight's afterglow
Sex driven death threats beget
Maniac death worshipping mother
Never *Death is the Mother of Beauty Wallace Stevens*
Not Camus *death first than life*
Rough transmogrification
Sex obsessed mother claiming
I am the last Victorian

Death your most important moment, Sheila Evans
Guardian angel for our father
We delivered him to her avenging angel
Mother's hands twisting with murder
Stuffing him a turkey's cavern
With medicines

Pills jammed his tongue swollen
Scared of her his beautiful Bluma
The end is near he said simply
As we drove off together
Leaving his home reluctantly
No longer safe near her
Desperate to dispose of her husband
Pathological narcissist madwoman mother
To dance travel revel *Merrie Widow*



Merrie Widow

He said simply
Bach is too beautiful no more Bach

Informing *the time is come*
His death belonged to him
Death his domain
Life too tempting
Bach fugue cantata requiem playing
Sheila and her extended Irish family gather
Ancient Celtic tunes regale
Died by his own hand and design
Weakened state he stopped eating
Organza lace trimmed curtains
Lifted to April breeze
Dad you died right
Dad you did right by death
Always a teacher
His a dignified way
To separate from life
More than a decade later
My death to consider
Mine to compose
Contemplated daily
Death by intention
Fitting its complexity
Find an outrageously
Beautiful out of the way place
My best friend *Karmalee* did
We were still in our twenties
Her mother wrote
Karmalee found a beautiful place
Took sleeping pills
Was not discovered for ten days

Dad you wrote on your calendar
Bluma wants me dead how sad

“so shalt thou feed on death
that feeds on men
and death once dead
there’s no
more dying then”

Shakespeare (Peter Brook, “Love is My Sin”)

To obviate the looming threat
The dread of dying
Death climbs me clings
Morning glories awaiting spring
Locate the willow tree
Look at it with new eyes

Search the Meer for swans
Three anomalous duck-geese
Move in straight line like *Madeline*
Bufflehead duck dives
Finding himself on the wrong pond
Spring crocus miniature daffodils
Pale pink tree buds still to flower
Life's moments fleeting

Death baiting mother
Unrelenting song
We live too long
It is so hard (to die)
Decanted over years decades
Death defying mother
Death turned its back
Would not do your bidding
Alive until you were 93
Passover Hanukah the High Holidays
Have come and gone
You nowhere to be found
Yours an extra empty chair
At the *Seder* table
Moving lips to text never learned
Prayer an anathema
Mother mixed up scattered Jew
Never mastered Hebrew
Grandiosity
Dialect of displacement
Her mother tongue

There is tragedy in every brush stroke. Mark Rothko

Death Be Not Proud

Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill me. John Donne



Gathering quotes like spring bloom
Crafting a garland wreath for my hair
Honoring the first of May
Time to move beyond gas chambers
Displacement no justification
For half-existence
April 16 the day you died Dad
More than a decade ago
And still you permeate a day
With wisdom in metaphor and song
I set upon a path
Shaping a quixotic disappearing
Composing an end
Not to let death have the first capture
With diligence shape an action
The soft scent of spring taken in
Dying woman defiant woman
Death be not proud
Dying must be mine to shape
I refuse its unraveling hand
The politics of dying
Mine to outwit move beyond
Never to beg for just a little more time
Existential day existential moment in time
Soon to end the life that is mine
Last moments defy imagination
How not to be afraid
When daylight forever fades

Naomi Barber

Early April 2010

What's best about dying death?

No more dentists no more mice

No more sleepless nights

NB

Girl Gone Wild

*A girl gone wild,
A good girl gone wild,
I'm like a girl gone wild,
A good girl gone wild...*

Madonna

Girl gone wild
All fired up
Stoked by what
Seasons of tyranny
A shadow self
Jolts memory
Astonishing
What fires what flame
Conspire
Bringing me
To my knees
Remembering
The *girl gone wild*
Beneath the coals
And spitting flame
Sexuality subterranean
Hot coals simmering ember
Sexuality buried deep under

Erupting in heat and fury
The girl sneaks out
What drove me
To become so estranged
What destiny what force
Made a stranger of me to me?

My imagination turns
On a skewer of curiosity
How did *Mt. Etna*
Pierce this interrogation
Force this probe
Startled
Taken by surprise
Sneak attack
Memory jolted
Shock followed by horror
What smoldered
What led me to prick
The dormant
Stuck blunderbuss
In the forbidding
Unconscious
Withering girl
Wife mother
Swaggered
Threat of death
And yet
Good girl gone wild
Cheated
On her killer husband
Lying vigil lion in wait
What bait what promise
What crushing need?
Threw me into the open
What heat
What furnace stoked
And why black men
Why black men to sin with
Never before
Saw them
As a trinity of deceit
A grouping
A three-card run
With probe
I pick through

Dig up
The desperation
That threw her
To abscond
With a raw self
Into the warm dark arms
Of three discrete men

The whimpering child
Intolerant of touch
Stiffened when approached
Repulsed by the prospect
Of a held hand or worse a kiss
Who was it that slipped off
At midnights in daylight
To let black men
Comfort and touch
Disconsolate neediness
Starved for embrace
Dark arms safer
Massacre murder
No feint threat
Erupted I, Mt. Etna
Fury pushed out of me
Absolution crazy frenzied need

What where are the tributaries
Leading to all of this
What tidal wave of need
Burst broke free
Don't know to be appalled
Shaken or in great admiration
Half-lived life
Stealth warrior
Got away with cheating
On the husband
Vowing to murder kill
If an eye veered
Cornering a stealth look
At another man
The dilemma the question
Marriage to a man
Who threatens murder
Keeps a gun loaded in drawer ajar
Tucked within a scholarly book
A gun with no safety lock

This man with artful holster
The man I married
After a three week courtship
Who was I to do this
Who moved my feet
I who promised beneath
A Spanish lace mantilla
To love honor and obey
And then strayed
To three black men
And one Englishman
Troubadour of the *Renaissance*
What dizzying volcanic force
Set me off on this crazy course?

Civil rights crazy evidence
Lack of prejudice
Following the *Drinking Gourd*
Star filled nights
Never a dream
To remember
Stray stealth wife
Cheats
Sexually hyped
Archetype
Trust or opine
Skin tone
To protect or devour
Black skin safe
Black skin salacious
Radical stand
Supine
Divine

Harsh unkind
Remembering
Life moves past
Death breathe at neck
Volcano dormant
No longer spitting lava
The heat cooled down
Body temperature falling
Seventy-year-old woman
No knack for adventure
Or misadventure
Of forays of sneaking out

Resigned if wistful
For a hand to hold
An arm about shoulder
A body covering mine
Tight like a tree bark
No longer fearful
Of being touched

The quest is unrelenting
How the good girl went wild
Behind her own back
The perennial haunting
Of oh my god *Pogrom*
The gas chambers
Treblinka and Auschwitz
The myth of me
The destiny
The entreaty
The soil I live on
Gas chambers
Flouting smoke
Curling cloud
Bodies stacked
Asphyxiated
Which of those
In the pile of detritus
And death a relative
Embodied so
Trenchant
To live subterranean
Penetrated inviolate
Holocaust
Inextricably unnerved
Racial identity
Made it impossible
To love
This scornful legacy
Piles of dead Jews
Did this exterminated flesh
Provide the motive
The excuse

Horrible
To face confront
Pick around
Petrified rock and rubble

Molten magma stilled
Mull and probe
What force drove me?
Sitting here reviewing
Wandering
The cooled down
Hot coals
Wanting
Not to remember
Or accept
A girl
Who refused love
Ran on
Errant midnight forays
Into the forbidden
When murder
If discovered certain
Not just threatened

Explore the formations
Of memory
Exploding on the present
Upheaval commotion
What motive
What past
Death catapults
Pushes me to truth
This was the past
I made
More mundane than mythic
More ordinary than heroic

Furies rising up
Mt. Etna hissing
Metaphors for healing
To understand
First night of Passover
Mother dead
Death she dreaded
Invited a sultry consort
To her bed
She lived afraid of life
Dreading death
Mythic dissonance
Taunting death
Furnace flings

Subvert magically
Death's courting
Her family props
Hosts to hide within

Jews my generation and older
Never leave gas chambers
Behind far from mind
Pogrom justification
For syndicated life
Caricature for cover
Pogrom to test loyalty
Justification for violating
Biblical lament
Silvery smoke rises
Pas de deux cloud and sky
They killed eight million
Scrabble board
Process of elimination
Slaughter
Pure evidence
God loves us best
Death by desecration
Sacred script scrolled
We scraped bottom
The number 8 million
Inked palm
Justification to plunder
Randy band
Of Jewish public school leaders
Ransomed my will
To stand apart named
Disloyal Jew hater

Where is the sweetness
The desert fruit and flower
The gathering on a common land
Fearsome warrior prickle and nectar
This Jew searching God
We heal we repair
Tikkum Olam
Prayer shawl from grandmother
English words
Never broke through her Yiddish
Tikkun Olam
My legacy my ancestry

Not *Pogrom* no not never
Forays as spit fiery as hazardous
Mocked jeered condemned
Putrid fumes to dangle
Oh *Pogrom* my *Pogrom*
Misplaced displaced *Diaspora*
Wandered into a job
With Jews zealot self-justifying Jews
The open mouth of Mt. Etna
Ephemera I escape myself
What land what harvest what mine?

Finding the why and wherefore
In spitting volcanic air and ash
In bodies heaped skeletons
This my legacy my *raison d'être*
How did I come to me
And what drove me
Violence and guns
Black men on the sly
A romp in *As You Like It*
I show more mirth than I am mistress of; and would you yet I were merrier? Unless you could teach me to forget a banished father, you must not learn me how to remember any extraordinary pleasure. (Rosalind, Sc. Ii)
Mandolin and troubadour serenade

Married him in three weeks
Forgot about him two weeks later
A man shouts out of a car
Hey where are you going
Who are you who is he
A recent boyfriend asked

Mining the log of disgrace
Venal history
God loves us
The struggle the testimony
The furnace spews a venal history
Gas chambers the source
The root cause of my misery

Mt. Etna explodes
Relevance to the story told
Haven't any idea how it got there
An earth growling deep beneath
Like a kiln firing up

How else to understand rampant passion
Like walking on hot coals
Unwinding the burden of my soul
The heat of the unexplored
Pushes out of me
What truth lies so near the surface
Volcanic active fuming mad
How hellish for my mind
To mindlessly wander off
Into the arms of a predatory Sicilian
It is the firing furnace
The eruptions
Draw me to this fiery connection

Galician girl caught up
In a Mandala of madness
Of gas chamber and active volcano
Thickened hands laid cinder block
Engineers the spigot to emit noxious fumes
Beneath the surface of soil and boulder
Earth smolders
We give the words
What connections to draw
Imagination falters
But the heat and flame
No breath lives beyond the molten
Lava driven skyward
Invisible gas choking life to silence

The earth boils over
Jews expire silver fumes dance
Ancient soil tilled and town stilled
Spilled over by molten lava
Somehow it all meshes
Earth warming glaciers melting
Flames shoot above decadence
It all has relevance
Not just a rampant imagination
Pushing in rhythmic pain
From body and mind
It all came to past
The marriage could not last
None could
But for now the first one
And how with furies burning within
Pushed my feet out the door

On tip toe never discovered
Never found or caught missing

HERE OCTOBER 10

Follow the drinking gourd
Search for an explanation
For my actions
Followed the stars
Who was the slave to be freed
Who was the run away
Constellation of men
Temptation
Ornery and irrepressible
Storming out of me
The song for Mahler to make
The hand fixes a note
But where is the note before
What drives fire from earth
What quicksand did I step from
Murderous threats to frighten me
Tempt instead
Who or what gave the all clear

A heroin addict, an actor, a man identified himself as a black bougie
All black, all black,
Did I want a nigger lover to haze
Wrote that back sometime in the '70's
Hack away at the haze of my guilt
Jewish girl in fashion
Le Roi Jones's wife Jewish
East coast jazz loving
Jews and Blacks
Smoke rings in synch
With the rhythms
Half Note Blue Note Vanguard
Shoulder to shoulder
Thelonious Monk Mondays
Sneaking off
Was going to have my day
Dutchman and Jewish girls
With hair frizzed and piled high
Angela Davis style
One more Jewish girl dabbling
What was the brew

The magic potion
That had me slipping off
Sipping the nectar of this forbidden fruit

Elevate my forays
Singing Follow The Drinking Gourd
Or Amazing Grace
Or I loves you Porgy
I refuse to be an ordinary cheater
Looking for the vein
The taproot
How did I stumble upon misery
Perpetuate misery
And sneak off from misery
At dawn an aching query
Ennobling the ordinary
In concentration camps, slavery
Women of Troy Sappho a poem
Ancient eruptions
Landing in Virgil's soil
How did my mind unearth
Connections so out of my league
How did I come to Sicily
When did I read the Aeneid
What drew me to the salve
The mercy of purple black skin
Of men with no political gain
We did not march arms linked
And then fold over into the heat
The passion of fists raised
Indomitable no no cause here
Temptation not in the heat of protest
I marched nowhere but out of myself

Embattled and left so vacant
Life so scantily imperfect
Imagination energy history making
Shrivel in the daylight
Sidebar life poor girl woman
Such a disappointment to herself
Making grandness out of silt
Sad in the mirror I am shriveling
My mind explodes the ruin mulled over
My hands mottled like a cresting red breast
I am growing bald without cancer or chemotherapy
I lost teeth the homeless on the bench have more

How did this happen to me
Galacian girl, Gordian knot, volcano bursting forth
Sicily, Iceland, the camps oh the camps
Pogrom is this where I begin
Oh god how dreary this narrative
Unhappy bride slips off
Only the gun pointing at my head
The gun beside the bed
Makes this more crazy and daring
It was not me it was never me
Anywhere the me of me did not exist
For this person I persist this quest

Need to lift this up
Not just a social justice romp
Not a need for equality
Sinister or slipshod
Slim and shallow
Wallow in a past
This was it
As I look back
I was angry about Emmett Till
Threatened to drop out
Give up my citizenry
Is this penance for arbitrary sinister
Justice for a whistling black boy

And then my gleaning back into
The Renaissance
My ancestors living in the uproar of chase
Expulsion and pogrom on the run
From whence a lady to drool and entice
A rightful Englishman strumming of love
I fell hard if briefly for this glorious
Interpreter of songs of love and grief
Strumming on a period lute
Oh love ached for an embrace
Transported back in time timelessness
Reckless stolen embraces
The innocence and full-lipped passion
Time drifted off and I became a maiden to love
I never was our could have been
Jewish girls didn't curtsy in the halls
Ladies in waiting captivated
By the lute and song
There I was unabashed in swoon

He in swagger compliant
Another plaintive maiden to service
The troubadour dispensing duty
The lyrics to velvet embrace
A friend came to fetch him
And I saw the same longing
The same taste for guilty pleasure
She wasp and wife of fellow musician
A bond of scorching secrecy
Never breeched
Etched in her history
A glint in time
We were bonded in hungers
Indulged by lute plucking fingers
An English lady to fall rapturous
At the knee of a very wandering troubadour
As faithless as a court jester
As glorious as any knight of the round table
I foolish groupie rubbed up and down
His velvety presence the strumming heart
Faithless, he took enchanting to be performance art
Did he sense desperation, danger (the witless gun)
This snuggling done in the kitchen
Just square feet from the draw ajar
The rare book cut out to hold the pistol
Knew of sparring in song and poem
His obligatory snuggle stepping from a nights sleep
A recompense for a bed and cup of Celestial Garden Tea
Thinking back, two of these lapses
Were with house guests
What demon what taunt or what blind eye
He the man with the gun invited them

None of this makes sense to me
Try as I will
I just see fire cracking passion
Shooting out of me devil may care
Nothing English about me
Early music
The remedy
The aching heart
The hunger
His easy grace
His chummy embrace
Practiced in the lore
Of courtly love

To submit to groupies
In his court
Nearly automatic automated response

Burst free
Heat turned girl inside out
Volcanic ash and belly belch
Fumes simmer in time
Break free the heat
Of past deceits columns angry smoke
Fire and fury
Gun packing fury
Husband bullet in chamber
No safety lock
Shoot first if get out
Out of hand
Crawl from the Gordian knot
Of his tyranny threats
And draw open just a stitch just a hint
Gun in book on his side of his bed
Wrapped in heirloom muslin
Rare book exacting cut
Holster to cradle gun
Draw left ajar
Nights clinging to the edge
The bed the cross hair
The trigger one touch
Release suspicion
Love making an obligation
Days assigned
Calendar records
Symbols for my behavior
O for orgasm, documented
As carefully as a war correspondent
We were at war
Sex is good sex is important
Rational talks
In his library
Professor to student
Independent study
Lecture
Translation please
I had no idea
Sex was to make babies
On the bus, people with babies
Had sex, pregnant women

The wild longed for poet in me
Lost deep pre-puberty
Too dangerous
Incest was a sin a crime
My father was a squatter within me
Dreams buried leagues
Father my safe person
Sex talks on afternoons
Sex kept to schedule
A routine as in brushing teeth
People can get used to anything
You do it to keep 'em from going wild
His Aunt told us recounting family lore
How her mother kept Alonzo tame and submissive
The belly bulges, the heat builds
Divine hell confession amnesia suppression
What the tincture for the boil over?
I was the earth blown apart
Lava spewing I was the flame
Crawling the sky above the ice floe
In Iceland spectacular falling
From vow but more
Something unleashed a barreling wind
There she was in whoring bar and panties
There she was pulling a staff member around her
There she was a regal English courtesan
At the feet of the lovely minstrel strumming of love
In her kitchen seducing the susceptible or obliging lute player
There she was watching as the bougie, his name for himself
In some anonymous room gingerly took down his pants
To fold carefully next to his shirt and sox
His shoes paired as if on display in a Florsheim window
He a colleague as ambitious a man as could
Find himself in the hierarchy of the Board of Education
Found in my desperation a way to climb
I submissive never knowing why and oblivious
To the recklessness and danger
Bristling that could surface on every layer
Every level of my existence
It is telling I watched him fold his pants
And submitted and threw in the bargain
The co-authoring of a couple of grant requests
Was she a helter-skelter mess
Or trying to hold on
The precipice of existence wearing thin
A colleague or underling or anyone

Mostly black would do the trick
Took the risk to maintain the status quo
As my heart was on the verge about to explode
What if I had resisted
Did my forays keep us alive
This side of life
Keep the menacing man at bay
Keep me sane in this insane way
I have always said
My triumph was not be locked up
In restraints stuffing fecal in my mouth
To silence the shouting
Mother how could you have
And Dad how disgraceful shabby and sad
I was a mad woman who did not topple
The innocence of these grand departures
To reign in or to keep redolent
The insanity that just moved up and down
My blood stream ready to spurt
Any jolt any truth any revolt rebellion
To set me loose unhinge me
The simplicity of these adulteries
The secret code in quilt and star
My own Gordian knot my own passageway
Misery and madness and yet
To see me leap and arabesque
Peter Paul and Mary Israel song
Children leap frogging along
One would never guess
The torment the notebooks pee stained
Tell it all but until today
Didn't find the patterns in the stars
Or in the flesh the pigment
Of the men hosts to calm and soothe
And stuff back inside the wild urge
To do what, slice my arteries, run away
Suicide was never an option
Just a mental exercise or game
I played with myself to stay integrated and contained
There she was breaking every code
Every regulation every law
Vow commandment promise
Tossed reckless the heat
Of her disavowal
That was not could not be her
On the prowl

Crazy girl frenzied girl taunting girl
Fate the force of flame the ashen streaming
Molten flower flowing flames shooting
I was wilder and less contained
Uncurbed lost my mind
The girl did not care
The draw open just so
Gold embossed rare book title forgotten
Gun in draw neon flicker blinking warning
Married less than ten days was taken
To some woodsy place outside Cambridge
Sure it wasn't Walden Pond but maybe
And handed the gun to shoot at trees
Trees, I love trees
Any husband who had known me
For more than three weeks before marrying
Would have known that bark and branch
Are kin to the veins and arteries
Fanning from my heart
His brother when we were married
Not quite six months, gave me a book
Of photography all about trees
The shooting spree
The gun drawn back shoulder jolt
The tree the sorry sorriest destiny
It was not to make markswoman of me
It was to issue a warning
I have a gun we have a gun
He slipped it back into its vintage holster
Sylvan shoot out defined the marriage
I was kept within one of those invisible fences
I could feel the electrical sting
If just a pointed toe stepped over
The electrified high wattage boundary
Neon rods of rebellious color primary color
Warnings the day-glow of the unsaid
The gun of molten lead the colors signs
Neon pipes or arcs Bruce Nauman Dan Flavin
The girl who knew art
Calculating forays
Out of skin out of range
She is no where to be found
No sighting just disappearing acts
But that gun is not what broke me
Still wet behind the ears of unspoken
Her rampant desire for suicide

Ran for cover to a stranger
Who took me to the Swiss Alps
Good, seas and mountain ranges
From the obsessing murderous mother
And then on the first night
In a hotel turned into Bundnerfleisch drying factory
Smelly feet farmer feet yet cleaned cow dung
Smelled a toes caught with pig remains
The ballroom just beneath our room
Swaying from chandeliers hanging corpses
Of drying beef on the way of becoming
The Swiss national delicacy
Here he kept her very well
On night one a bride not known even a year
Left her to reminisce over bundnerfleisch and beer
At the local post hotel
Friends gathering to for the seminar
Studying reverence for life ala Albert Schweitzer
Don't know if he forgot about me
Intentionally didn't include me
And for two years I was the shadow
On the Alps as daylight faded
We had only a few hours in our closed off narrow mountain village
And in another mountain village
High above the Mediterranean on an upper tier
In the south of France
Try to make the mental leap
I stood on a ledge outside the cottage
Veiled in vine and a coast leagues below
Twinkling lights of Nice or Cannes
And shrieked or roared wretching
And clawing the night
Sounds of ache and despair
Sounds of the unscreamed struck dumb
By their fate and destiny
I heard this scream before
When I left the desert and the Navajo's
Lying on the grass in front of my aunt's house
My mother's sister Rebecca in Albuquerque
I felt and heard the same scream come out of me
Raving and resigned each time
Six weeks after returning from the Southwest
I married him and at the South of France
Where he brought me for repair
Even he sensed nervously the fragility
I howled in futility to the night sky

That would not release me
As it heard me scream and rave and cry
Each time went further inside
And so I explore my straying with humility
If embarrassment and a great sense of displacement
Escaping to lute player renaissance troubadour
Black man folds clothes as if the fitting room at Barney's
Pattern cutter precision
Drives a BMW everything tight
Sidestepping any stereotype
This black man was Dutchman
Brooks Brother suit and tie
Everything but skin about him white
What was the daredevil attraction to him
There it was found a way to trick
The wired fence to cut through time
To lay adulterous heaven help with him
He was subversive cute on surface
Raw ambition sucked in hard
To appease the tempers of the boss
She held the key he folded the pants
Better here not to have strayed
But that is not the point
The whole of this is curiosity
Regret with the heft and distemper
Of being horrified appalled
I could have done better much better
Wandering off, my world has and is so small
Harlem an anathema, studied white
Four hundred acres and a mule
I was the holder of the deed
Cut off a civil war embattled soldier
Keep hidden no whiff of blackness here
Heroine addict black from the streets
Clean but sunk in the detritus of ghetto life
His sexuality wizened and collapsed as the shards of track marks
Became a sort of relative, had a child with a found daughter
Orphan and foster girl picked up on a Philadelphia street corner
Joined lives with mine, proof evidence I was a sister of social justice
Not to challenge my loyalty brought me out of any hypocrisy
And found her with the baby meant for me
Three black men, there was a third
Actor in Beckett and on Broadway
Deep purple black, celebrated stayed at our house
Hands groping beneath the dining room table
In our royal maroon Philadelphia dining room

Sexpot goes to NYC on Amtrak
Foray at midday on Ninth Avenue and 57th street
He makes sure I eat a good lunch then obliging sex
Actor appeases the fury of the obsessed girl
Knew the danger even invited her
To come west to Hollywood
Not really just to make this soiree feel honorable
Three black men and an Englishman
An English troubadour family crest
He rubbed up and down girls
To curry favor build audience
He was whoring in his minstrelsy, his descriptor
Gun in drawer children eating cereal
Mother strums guitar
Too difficult to watch them
Play with food as if roulette
This mother who looked out her kitchen window
At the Sunday lovers clinging to the light post
This woman on a schedule
This woman who had no idea
About passion and sexual desire
Her hunger to challenge set her on these forays
Black men proved her lack of prejudice
Or calmed her abated her curiosity
So wide open hard to see
Husband with gun
For whom adultery
Was a sport a rite an entitlement
Never once suspected
The same game played by wife
Desperate challenging danger seeking
Thirty years back
Never got the sex part right
Next husband promised
To bring the heavens down
To help me find my body my sexuality
To keep me young to be my tonic
My fountain of youth
Deal with the devil
Marred with devil scars
Of all he was the worst
Of all I deceived myself beyond fixing
Girl gone wild
All to futility
Though not afraid of death at his hand
Had promises of my own never kept

This difficult terrain to explore
Words jammed up
But indeed that was me
Flying upward wild flames
Surly flames challenging sky
Ash singing lunch
Not to breathe in
The belly heat of earth
Boils over every so often
Villages lava fell upon fixed in time
Dishes on table chair spilled over
Petrified lives in rubble and ash
This time of my life
Frozen not to be denied
Motives are crazy to decipher
Running from a gun
Running from a threat
Heat from dreams never dreamt
Pushing like torrential ran like fierce wind
Against my feet
Who knows how or why I landed there
On the other side the yellow brick road
The Oz of my past has no answer for me
Three black men the array of black history
From slavery to satisfy my unsavory appetite
An Englishman strums songs of love
Maiden swoon maiden submit
I was the riff, imploding and acting
About certain things that husband will never know
And I gave the gun and book and muslin
To the divorce lawyer
Jewish guy never had one
Who disposed of it
Thinking he would be disbarred
I got the divorce I deserved
Left everything behind
But a piano a cello some clothes and prized jewelry
Rings and jewels stolen, hammocks in the breezy
Living room the underground railroad
The place we hid in broad day light in
Geranium plump and red with life
Knew I had to get out
Trying to avoid remembering these forays
Episodic bleeding of the imprisoned wife
Living in a pumpkin shell
It was not just her imagination

But a gun and a fear I would
Bring him to harm emasculate him
If I took the gun away
Imagine the face of the therapist
As I shared this with her
My voice not even a decibel more shrill
Or mixed with a vibrating tremolo
Leave me with nothing I will kill you
Smile like Mona Lisa
I defied you you bastard
And now I can leave you
Crazy as the band of us departed
The gun evidence tossed Jewish lawyer never had one
Mutes the testimony the truth
And I look back remembrance of things past
Almost in disbelief
What a girl will do to defy a monster a keeper
What a girl will do on the upswing of heat
What a girl will do who can't shake
The past, "the neurotic ordeals of their agonized progeny,"
Amos Oz describing the fled the diaspora
The Jews who left the old country for the lower East Side
Eventually winding up in Newark or New Jersey
Allen Ginsberg, Philip Roth and the other never un- sad ones
My father said days from death
If only I had conducted or composed more
This not regretting the death swoon of his marriage
And our catapult from any stretch of the imagination
And chance for a normal life for love for work
To turn out more right than bad
But this tale more or less true
Is what I had what I did with what I had
The raw material primordial never more
The sloppy earth upon which I stepped
And spent each day
Trivial and afraid
Is this to share to let out secrets
Or to explore the defeat I feel
The coward I was
The girl gone wild
Not a spit of relevance or meaning
Or grandeur in these recounted acts
Never moved beyond desperation
The mechanics beyond me
Trivial pursuit of an ill-conceived destiny
Scared at the birth rattle unnerved mother

Indentured from the moment of birth
My regret as the air is harder to take in
That even as I ran to Branch Brook Park at 5
That I never continued to run like hell
Not looking back until I bumped into real myself
The life meant for me
The measure in the enormity of my day lit daydreams
Naomi Weiss Barber 4/10

Don't Bother Calling

Don't bother calling or asking to meet
Don't want to, too late
I've moved beyond wanting you
The girl who was and the woman now
Would not have pursued you
The woman who has become me
Is no one who would have attracted
Or been attracted to you
You, you, you whom I have held
In a magical locket close to my heart
Longing and regretting longing and regretting
Now I see the futility of that pursuit
I could never have wanted you
And vice versa, awakened at the arc
Of secular sacred sexuality, lovemaking
Our religion our everything would have
Sent me out of the arched gothic cathedral doors
Bosch and devil may care, the body is the gothic
The religion the Jesus sensations hosannas to the highest
After all this was to my calling
Looking back of the arc the arch of time
The back rising and falling like waves for a full moon
This was not my calling
After an Arabian nights worth of love making
When my body had learned to resonate
Fingers vibrating with the fullest and most sensuous song
No here is where I don't belong
Love making beneath the billowing test of Kama Sutra

After the first hurt, the first hard hold
A mother's stiffened arm, a sob of regret
To challenge time, still dewy with amniotic fluid
The Druid chant the burden of history
Misery caked the arteries of our bloodline
That loving you tell of would repel or confuse
I could not rest easy at your bedside
My heart burst opulent with honey and spring flower
Wanting to love and hold you whomever you were
Grateful that you asked me to, thank god for you
But now fifty years gone and a long and truthful look backward
I see that my body although full of weeping
Could never respond like a string beneath a tremolo
That lovemaking for you or with you was not in the making
John don't bother calling or stepping back in time
To see what could have been
You were right when you put me back
Lovemaking could not have been my only pleasure and desire
At nearly 70 I see a girl who longed for poetry
And connection to a frenzied Jewish intellectual identity
Full of sadness and Diaspora lived in exile from myself
The books I haven't read the journeys I haven't taken
The longing for wholeness in writing and contemplation
Your premonition was correct
If I didn't settled on one flower to lick the pollen free
I would eternally be searching for an unknown never named
This my rugged and brutal destiny
This has come true, you who are dead
Last years throttled with Lou Gehrig's disease
Found in me as you struggled with yourself
A woman who never became and never could attach herself
Never could commit never could connect
Bach and Proust left to drift, my fingers only dabbled
In the waters of timelessness, don't call John
I am resurrecting the girl whose imagination is in default
As her memory evaporates like morning dew
I refuse not to know or claim what life
I left to dangle as I harbored like a rat in a maze
Futile the route I take a route to a dead and eternally unloving mother.

Naomi Barber
March 15, 2010

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Army Jacket, Vintage
As Molly Bloom Would Tell It and I Were James Joyce

I don't want you now. I want you then. I want then. Didn't know then was everything. Or did I? You were that impossibly wonderful great love. I was that impossibly unloved child. Predator mother and appeasing father. You were intolerant of my tales of woe problems with my mother. You once sternly little light tap to my face, said, don't want to hear about your problems again. That should have been the sign you were the right one the only guy for me the only one who would ever be.

Was it 1958 or 1959 we were at Newark Airport it was in the early days of flying. Your eyes glistened with anticipation. You were going to learn to fly planes. Aviation airports airplanes sanguine man, man with weighted words man lost in the dust of dreams. Dreams awakened standing at the fence watching the plane engines whirr rev up for flight taking off. Never knew where you really came from New Sharon Iowa by way of Argentina where you father worked in a meat packing plant. You were so secretive to create mystery or to keep your self-invention unraveling? I did love you whomever you were or wherever you came from.

I was always second best first Susan who married Peter and left you abruptly. You seemed crushed almost defeated but "thank god" for me a palliative my arms. Than fast-forward, a decade later in a restaurant in a West Village Middle Eastern restaurant hummus and lamb kabobs there you were Susan. You seemed to remember me, we exchanged subdued hello's, don't think we ever spoke before even at college, I asked if you knew where John was yes, he is in Washington, didn't asked how she knew. Couldn't remember your middle initial but while at a Political Science Conference in Washington with my husband dialed every John Noble in greater Washington and there you were on the other end where can we meet and when? Got the schedule of meetings my husband would attend the call of your voice irresistible against the high stakes risking it all against the circumstances and conditions of my marriage. My husband had a loaded gun without a safety catch in the bedside table, his side, wrapped in rare muslin and folded into a rare cutout book which served as a holster, this in case I strayed in word or deed or thought or even thought of leaving him. He poured through my writings which I kept hiding over and over and even brought to a friend's house for safe-keeping when the inevitable end of the marriage was near.

And so we meet somewhere between the Hilton on Connecticut Avenue and DuPont Circle. And there you were there you were you were so beautiful band you seemed so lonely and forlorn. Your wife had just left you with two young sons. Didn't ask details, you worked as a deputy administrator in the Department of Health and Welfare my mother thought you would amount to nothing but a beer swigging motorcycle-riding goyim. There a decade or more later my heart thrashed like a snared giant fish. The girl who was a virgin and for whom you were the first and whom I actually asked are you democrat or republican after I got my breath back. Never ceased being elusive and vague about your identity and where you came from. John, the named welled up in my throat a timeless aria of lost and found love,

John, it spilled out at first warm old friend embrace I am a married woman with two small children I am married to a tyrant and a madmen, knew him only three weeks before the wedding, my parents practically shoved me down the aisle. My father who cupped my hand corrected the grammar as I wrote the Dear John that ended our relationship, and ended any chance I had for a great and true love to hold and keep holding the love of my life cut with the quill and nib of pen with a covetous father bending over shoulder, fixing stamp and mailing off. Why you asked? Elektra wedded to a much-abused father subliminal his touch and reach. Love still too unwieldy and dangerous too scared to come out in the open. My passion and love to great for me to hold onto, fell backward with fear and trepidation and not wanting to hurt him, my father. I don't know the truth to this day but that truth monitor gets close as it heats up the frequency of its beeps. Before dawn is forever lost to me, I will want to know why ever I closed the door, shut it so irrevocably tight, to the one right one who came so close.

We planned to meet again I watched you walk away think back to work. My heart lurched with that pain that comes at a deathwatch. I watched you until I could find you no more. Within weeks as luck would have it with my husband's blessing his old school head master offered me a consulting job in Virginia helping a boarding school reform its educational program. This man had worked with me before and knew I was right for the job and my need to sever my umbilical connection to this suffocating and dangerous man, my husband, he agreed that he was difficult and perhaps could be murderous. As soon as I got to my hotel I called and we agreed to a drink at the train station before I left the next day. It turned out to be your thirty-fifth birthday, "I was always afraid I would be alone on my thirty-fifth birthday," you tell me. And here I was "thank god" for me again and Hosanna. But never once man of weighted words and undisclosed past never a full lipped, full throated I love you. Strange I lost my innocence to you on my birthday was I twenty or twenty-one? I lost myself to you and never came back whole again and never heard you say out loud stay with me be with me be my wife implied but never said aloud. But that is not the reason I ran from you. Again you referred to my hurtful Dear John letter. That letter shaped my entire life, became my destiny Dear John Dear John Dear John. I let you slip away, let go of you, shoved you off closed the door while you were patrolling the recently erected Wall in Berlin called back as a Reservist into the military. It is the stuff of movies saw once recently with a better ending but a Dear John, name of movie, letter to slice an artery of a soldier warding off enemy hostility.

And then for the next time I came for my consulting job, this time for three nights and four days, we arranged to meet. I would get a hotel room but stay with you at a friend's apartment. You had me paged at Central Station for the world to hear at the information booth the man said go directly to the apartment he won't be able to meet you here. Wife of jealous raging murderer husband paged at the Washington D.C. train station with a message from her lover. Got a cab and found my way you arrived soon after. There we were awkward but present. You gave me a once over and said hey, tough tits, I was dressed in tight jeans and a black turtleneck with breasts as pointed as an arrow to a lover's heart. We mostly held tightly to each

other a decade of lost time eclipsed as mysterious as the disappearing moon in King Arthur's Court. The next two nights we spent in a vacationing friend's contemporary house on a ledge overhanging Rock Creek Park's rushing water and breaking waterfalls. The bedroom was sweeping its great window framing the park and the woods beyond. And then and then, "thank god" for me. We loved all night tears damned by a decade of denial and forget spilled and spilled waters washing me away with elapsed and unforgiving time. My body was ripped apart by this uncanny visit of the past on my present and forbidding life. The happiness I had written off in a discursive and abrupt goodbye was almost too much for me to hold and contain. The next days after work before the sun let out, we rode on your motorcycle over back rural roads. There I was in danger of being murdered if unfaithful a mother of two very small children where my love for them was the only pure unadulterated thing about me holding you tight around the waist wearing no helmet careening impossibly curvy back rural roads. The night before I was to leave we had dinner at a friend of yours house. I sat shamelessly on your lap my arms around you slim shoulders. They were indulgent and solicitous they must have known how you suffered when your wife walked out. In the morning when you drove me back to the hotel, you said as slowly as one who speaks to someone for whom English is not a native tongue, "I am going to marry Diane." In our time together there was not even a momentary lapse in which I could peer in or spot rival. There the enigmatic you, the mystery brewing as you tried to capture a moment in backward time. We are going to marry, you continue, she likes sex as much as I do we make love every night. Sex, or lovemaking, has become central to my life. With that he kissed me firmly to let me know this would be the last kiss the last touch the last hold. How often do you get to see what mistake chance gave you to avoid? He was right to pick this new woman. My body was still at thirty not connected to passion or sensuality. I was trying to hold myself together as a murderous husband insisted on a schedule of two nights on and one night off for obligatory wifely sex. John did not have the time or inclination to bring the woman part of me to life. Perhaps before he left to patrol the Berlin Wall but not anymore.

Fast forward to the present. Looked John up on Goggle and found him listed in a suburb of Washington living with a wife and son around thirty. And two feeble attempts, one an art card from the Guggenheim And another art card as well No response, sure you tossed them and hoped I would go away Could you sniff the desperation the sorry tale Problems was too small a word for what I let transpire How I took my life, how I trashed my heart I was never even for a moment disloyal to you And then my overshadowing mother died Finally at 92 having taken up my whole personal life My brother shouted out, look what I found What ever happened to John Noble? I don't know I said matter-of-factly He gave me the copies of the photos I had in a frame above my bed And took the chance to send them to you Simple note, my mother died, found these, thought you might want to see them You are in an army uniform, I had on a strapless checkered summer dress We looked like we are in love or you looked like you were in love with me Always that little look askance, still to keep your privacy,

to hold back a bit or a lot You wrote back in two days, thanks sorry about your mother my wife and I and glad you are well best wishes and signed your name, John Best wishes the final stab in the heart the final lurch my heart has settled in It is near death along with me, accepted that love will never flare it up again Each day each day a revelation and baby aspirins I am existential without trying, no airs just fully here Jealously guard my time, keep friends at arms distance Hold nothing back from my grand children and am radiant The kinds of love and admiration and pride I genuinely feel for my children I am trying to retrieve nice memories with my first husband The life-style is as far as I have gotten and of course the children The second husband riles me with hatred, disturbs my heart's clarity It's simple if irregular beat When I got you're letter my hands began to shake like an alcoholic falling backward While holding myself in place I was trying to scheme ways of getting in touch again Arguing with myself every day be honorable leave him alone He practically told you to with those best wishes left no door opened So struggle do it don't do it don't and then a vision Waiting for a Fifth Avenue bus there you were slender my very John The same easy stride, in an army jacket, with a hoody Crossing the street with a sort of saunter you came near enough For my heart to flutter for my eyes to be Transported back in time I almost ran toward you Or to get a closer look I was all smiles I was that girl who loved you and still loves you The love of then, I saw I was right to love you You resembled no one who came from the old Weequahic neighborhood I was my own person with you belonged to none of that I was so beautiful you said at one point become a dancer I could have in my mind be Martha Graham of Maria Tallchief I was right there With your love, I was in love I have been in love real love I did find my true love my great love And re-found him and he let me know he was still alive And still not available to me The guy in army fatigue crossing the street brought me back I don't want you now the now of who you are I want to go back to then I am back to then I am so happy that I discovered my love for you again I did have everything I had you And you god bless me had me And still have me, time stood still But it was once it did happen I had the nose for love And I did know it It is not so dismal so dreary looking back over my life I do not feel so defeated so to be pitied so sorry for myself God damn it John I loved you you were my true love I forgot to ask if you ever learned to fly planes At Newark Airport in 1958 or 59 I loved my life At a chain link fence watch the ascent and descent of planes We were holding hands on that sacred day I saw you fully you couldn't or didn't want to hide your desire for flight To fly your own plane you were totally revealed uncovered That was our moment a girl opulent with love and dreams of more love Love getting even greater and a man who just wanted to tuck into Hold the throttle pull it back and lift up above cloud and fray Who ever you were and wherever you came from New Sharon Iowa is the place that gave birth to me as a woman Mystery man hard drinking man, man whom I do not desire In the present tense, your signature sacred I am grateful You gave me a sign that you were still and forever more Unavailable to me but I don't want a man in his early seventies.

Naomi Barber

March 2010

I Want You Young Again

I don't want that old guy
Husband of Diane
Father of three
Prostate and erectile dysfunction
And god know what else
Signature looked over seventy to me
I don't want that guy
Who goes out as a couple
They are all over gray couples
Speckled hands and lower arms
Jowls dipping like hankies folded at triangles
The old familiarity shoulders brushing
Knees touching elbows at right angles
Ordering and eating no not that man
I don't want to tell my sad tale
My failures my blindness my nullified personal life
I don't want to see you old
I don't want to know you know
And your response to the photos I sent
Of us when we were in our very early twenties
Was straight from a book of etiquette
Of don't disturb, put down gently firmly and clearly
Waiting for a bus yesterday I saw you
I found you again
My heart fluttered
There you were slender crossing the straight
In an army jacket, hoody underneath
There you were and then I knew
Why it was love at first sight
And how you were so different from the others
I did chose right
You were grateful for me but in love with others
I was an indentured daughter
My father couldn't lose me to you
But I was right
I am so relieved
You were exactly the guy for me
Army jacket, hoody, jeans, slender
An easy saunter almost a glide as you crossed the straight
Right before my eyes you and

The girl who was right to love you
Fifty years later I am appalled by my life choices
Or the lack there of
Until I spotted you just an old tree or two away
I liked the girl who fell for you
My heart is lighter my desire to see you hear from you again
Gone
Got that Mona Lisa smile, the goyishe guy for me you
How wonderful and how wise.

Naomi Barber
March 5, 2010

Stud and pimp

You don't count
I don't count you
As a husband
You were an outlier
I was a liar
Self-deception my game
How else
To promise myself
To you outlier
Prick bad worse words
Cross my mind and lips
You are a sex crime predator
Killing off female desire
Enslaving entangling
Extinguishing
To think you harvest
Female desire
Genetically hybrid
Half man half taunt
Circus in town
Riding off
In the sunset
With this one or that one
We are all your first whores
Pretender to Marat Sade
Sadist and poseur
Snuff out the life force
Females beware
A cute Satan from
The Bronx
To woo you appears

Lover supreme
He claims
Starved and lonely hearts
Open like clams
To morning sandy heat
When he gets you
In the palm of his hand
He sees what you can offer
Tallies it up
And the demands come
With each fuck
He gets one wish filled
And yes
Pathetic me
Said yes
This my sordid destiny
After one marriage failed
I jumped into his bed
And failed myself
The final chance
For true love trounced
Death is coming for me
Trying to accept
Or make peace
Or forgive myself
How could I
I could and I did
Say I do
In the chapel of St. James
At the Cathedral of St. John
Bitter pill to swallow
The intersection
Of life and death
And all I can find to say
Is how could I have
There was never a man
Not one
I ever knew
Who was this scabrous
This pimp man
I gave him
My last and final chance
For love
Rough stuff
Rough stuff

Bringer down of all and any
Dreams of love topples
Of love dreams
You are a sex appetite destroyer
You take a woman
Her face
And smash it
Alone with ancient
Fantasies for solace renewal
Slaughter sacrifice
Rabid desire blinds
You come on
A swift soft talking
White knight
Clamoring to delight
You swamp desperation
Spring buds never grow
On rancid putrid soil
Renewal dashed
Chance gone
Love fell under
His sullen stomping feet
His sad sorrowful bidding eyes
A needy man who could fuck
And said first and foremost
He adored women all womankind
Didn't know to run
Solipsism and wounds fresh
I was ready prey
And prey he did
Drenched with his preying
Recoiled finally but too late
I was gone dried up
By the time he ran off
With his next woman
You were my stud my pimp
Mean like pimps
Mean like studs
Mean
Led with nose
With prick
And you were one
Bristling with anger
Vile man stud man
Cock sure man
Cock

You don't promise yourself
To a pimp
Missed all cues
Got used up
Laughed at my age
Old lady
Sagging jaw line
Jagged jaw line
Stud pimp
Given up
Regretting you
If only'd you
Stud imagine
I got to be
70 still hating you
Still hurt by you
Still twisted
Sex starved me
Will die that way
But hopefully
Will kill the hatred for you first
Before that last and final breath
Wasted hours
Wasted breath
Wasted mind and heart
Ugh! Still sting from
Your tongue-lashings
Your barbed words
Your shocking taunts
Demands outrageous really
Give me your money
I want all of your money
I am on the way up
You down
You walk wrong
You stink
You have no feminine wiles
I forbid you
From making marinara sauce (gravy)
How dare you
Serve this to me
And in the movies even
You put your
Arm around me
These drub about
Inside of me

Relentless
Can't run from
Can't pretend
You never happened
And oh ache
For so long
Ouch nauseating really
Active present tense man
Still some soaking up
Bile inside me
And not ready for release
They brew
I've got to release
Fly and release
Get them out
But stud pimp
Self-promoter mediocre
Man chip on shoulder
Phony sadness
Poseur cipher (Jeremy's apt description)
Caught you perfectly
Fish too small and puny to keep
Yet I did
What was on my mind
You would save my youth
Fill me succulent
With juice and honey
To be sipped on
Honey suckle rose
Sing and lick
I would rise
From the ash
Of intimidation
To a full womanly rosy
Rubin's glory
You starved me
Staved me off
Mocked me
Dried me up
Dizzy with contempt
Yet, at you yes
And at myself
This is not therapy
I just refuse
To take full responsibility
You irresistible

Plunderer
You had practice
There were other
Fallen women before me
And oh the bodies
Pile up now
They toss you
After you shrivel them
They flee
Wounded holding
Onto what is left
Of their femininity
You are a monster actually
An ogre
And think so otherwise
How dare you
Think well of yourself
You still harbor yourself
As a *good man* (your words)
How could you
When the evidence
Points in the other direction
We are a Greek chorus
Of the harmed and hurt
Prick bastard
Stud pimp
And you don't even fuck well
You don't ever make love
There is no love in you
To express
Your narcissism is outsized
Even you should have
A dimmer view of you

Wouldn't speak to Rebecca
Fought at airport
When she left for college
Rich people can't feel
Same pain as poor ones
Have no right
Only I have the right
Pimp man
Getting rid of you
The if only's
Regret free
Walking away

No longer
Shocked and ashamed
Well almost
No longer
You were
Someone I could
Have up close
Who was *normal*
Evidence of how little
I knew of what *normal* was
Ordinary that you were
No far worse
Ordinary people
Do not
Have a usurer's
Black and dark heart
You exploit
You talk a good game
You have mastered soulfulness
Time for me to quit
Don't you think
Haven't had hide nor hair
Of a man
For a decade or more
Kicking you out
Of my mind
Moving on
Brewing brewing brewing
My hatred for you
But of course
You did me harm
I did you good
You have a sheepskin
I have a spurned shriveling
Raider invasive
Bad bug harmful germ
Stay out of my heart
It's last beats
Deserve to be free
Of your breath
In between
The thump thump of me
Get out of me
And my memory
Remembrance of things past (Proust)
Don't want you among them

Enough of you
Too much time and thought
For someone so unworthy
Pimp stud
I picked you
Wanted to be a girl
Tossed around
I wanted to be a girl
A woman
Sexy sexual
Advertisement for myself (Mailer)
So studied so practiced
Stud trap set
So much clap trap
You talk a good game
Foucault man
What a laugh
Feral student
You picked up on him
Without precedent
Without knowledge
Of who or what
Came before
Virginal scholar
Untarnished unbiased
No history of any knowledge
Precursors what the hell
Be damned pretender
Poor Foucault
Turning over in his grave
That you dared to interpret him
And yet
You wear a hood at graduations
And you have Ph.D.
Affixed after your name
I gave that to you
Jeremy practically wrote
Your dissertation
We pretended you were
A Talmudic scholar
And you fell right in line
You usurer exploiter
No *backsies* can take it back
Scratching to get you out
Bloodstains scratch
Marks on my insides

Enough dear heart
How many
Beats do you have left
Don't spend them being
Ticked off on him
Pushing off
No more regret
No more if only
No more remorse
No more
Self-flagellation
Gratifying in a way
For finding you
Pulling you into my bed
And pretending I had a real lover
For a change
Someone who
Wanted to love and
Make love to me
Snake in the grass
You slithered onto me
I was lost from first slither
First entry
You said
Women faint fell faint
When they haven't made love
Haven't had it for awhile
You hit me right
And then held a mirror
Up to my face every day
To say
My how old you look
My how you have aged
And only
Since yesterday
Spit it out
Unearth it
Rant cant
Kant Foucault
Oh what the hell
Leap
Jumble mumble
Absurd
Ridiculous
That I could love you
Can't believe it

But I did it
Married you
Fool I am
I am Dr Sues
Jumble mumble fool
For love
No I wasn't
Just depressed
Smelly
And so fucking innocent
Of fucking of lovemaking
Astonishing really
You looked harmless
Wolf in sheep's clothing
There you were
Fresh fruit
For the picking
Wrong apple bad apple
That one
Throw it back
Should have
Too small too putrid
To keep that catch
Should have wondered
If I could catch that one
Something wrong there
Like no one ever knew before
His mirror only sees him
In there in *thar*
As our son found says
Found my son
I love him
The other had ears poking out
Don't fool with fate
Destiny
You tampered
I tampered with you
Tempered fate
Future doesn't work
We spurned the
Flow of truth
The natural bent of the river
We shouldn't have
We returned a street kid
To the street
But in NYC not in Ascension

Still burned spurned inside
Still not out of me
Still sickening me
You you
How to get rid of you
How stud pimp
How could I have
And face the crowd of me
Looking the years and days can
Hardly say the number 17
17 years days hours
How could I have
In this splash of 70 there
Was you and in some of the best ones
How ashamed
Got to go beyond
How maimed
How foolish
What folly by golly
Move on
Be gone
Let me live on
Want to live on
Without the sulk the bulk
The heave ho
Let me step beyond you
Death licks at me
At last gasp
Want to be free
Of thinking about you
Regretting you
Feeling hurt by you
Feeling appalled
I picked you
Runt of the litter
My past littered
With bad love
You rose to the top
Worst of the *baddest*
How to live and let live
And outlast this
The bitter bitterest taste
Of your
Fugal nose-holding embrace

Purge push pogrom putsch putrid

I putsch you
Humour alliteration
Maybe life is creeping
Back in
And feeling less sad
Less embarrassed
Less sad
Less bad
Stage my own putsch
Pogram
Run from me
I after you
Will rid myself
Of you
You have infiltrated
I will debug me
Get rid of your
Ratty infestation
Oh god
How could I
I'm getting rid of you
I have earrings on
Expecting to see no one
Just the park
Of course ducks and geece
If they are uncelcomed
And the lone white duck goose
I call Minnie
Lost her two other sisters
And oh ache the swans
The killed one
And the one taken away
How glorious
His spit and swagger
And wind flap
And neck plunge
Getting rid
Of the onslaught
His wife swan wife
Protecting the eggs
All smashed to smithereens
Shell orbits left
After they disappeared
I am that swan chasing you
Off get away
Get out of me

I hate you still
That is what I am
Trying to remove

Naomi Barber
2010

Death is Hunting Me Down

We are Not Dirt or Dust
(Iranian Song)
You have to constantly live with fear
(Mohsen Namjoo – Iranian in exile)

Death is hunting me down
Hot breath nighttimes
Breathing down neck
Sunrise to dusk
Let go let go
Make yourself irrelevant
Remove yourself
Don't try to insinuate
The solipsistic lonely pursuit
The game the question
How will they live beyond me?
We went on without mother
She didn't believe we would
Or didn't want us to
What of their future can I see?
Mine is clear
Breathing stops heart goes
And then ash floats in the park
Or at sea thrown from the hands
Freeing me
But first need to free them of me
Long before they release the ash
And have a good weep
Lucy had Adam and Eliza
Leave her behind
She was still alive
Her body corrosive
Searing pain cancer
The galloping headless horseman
She said goodbye

Long before she died
She watched them outside herself
Gave them her world her secrets
If death is the mother of beauty (Wallace Stevens)
Then I am her witness
Death stalks me
Like no lover ever has
The days' left are mine
Mine to craft and design
Pity me if they are half
Pity me if fear still slashes
I shake myself awake
Remember dreams
Locked in Brazilian prison
Hacked girl but not killed her
Is this what I feared?
To wake with each day
I know I am a hacker
And murderer
My own hand stifled no
Stiffer word smothered
I was the girl hacked up
I was the girl locked up
Why Brazil?
Big tyranny there before Lula
Tropicalia the songs of resistance
Unstoppable Brazil, Iran, the slaves
The song the rhythm the step
No smothering hand no suffocating hand
Strange Fruit Billie Holliday
Music madness and salvation
Breaking free breaking loose
These poems, these writings
Mine mined
They will never reach
The slackest sentence or rhyme
Of Yeats or Stevens or Plath
Truth and resistance
I go deep and release
Trick myself, press death
A wilting flower for words
Words to take root
And come to life
The colors of petals
Always so surprising unnerving
We were meant to be bold

Birds stained with our disconnect
Lie pathetic claws scratching
Kicking like a hypertonic infant
What have we done?
I lived so dimly lit
Shrouded the light from within
Not exactly lies but half-dim
Inevitable leaving what is left
What is known beyond
My script my narrative
This is all folderol
Sophomoric pap
This is all what I have left
I am gone more than here
I have gone nowhere real
Nowhere
I imagined little
And did less
Self-pity oozes like pus
Life oh life afraid to live you
Healthy body healthy mind
Resigned gone time
Nothing to fear nothing to lose
The horror the knowledge
I was never ever fully here
And the mean streak the jealous stripe
But done selling myself
Don't care – Sophie your friends
Don't have to like me
No time to pleasing them
Little tyrannies private
Terrorist run amok
Mother and child
No surveillance cameras allowed
Death chases I still walk fast
Hardly any time left
What to do
When love is out of the question
Being excellent at anything as well
Do flowers care that I appreciate them
Or the sun or the moon or trees
The purpose the meaning
Death chasing
No time to even know that
Not yet soon though

Naomi Barber
Early June 2010

Pellets of Poison
June 2, 2010

Pellets of our poisonous past
Are in the well
Are in the waters
Slick and thick as the Gulf oil spell
Murky and unstoppable as well
Seeped in agony of dispersal
Of refusal of flight
Diaspora's pain pellets
Poison runs thick
Blood stream tainted
Harm done too late
Unstoppable horrible
We were drawn to tyranny
To tyrants like ants around crumbs
Like rats to rose buds and branch
Submit succumb dumb without words
Wordsmith all words dribble like drool
Like cruel gruel
Flock like cawing geese
To calamity to fast flight
Her screams her fist pounding
Her temples outlived her beatings
Ninety-years until she decided to die
Perhaps her agony her curling
At the stove or furnace edge
Not quite submitting her head
Perhaps her pounding
Like the mean torrential
Hurricane driven oceans pounding
Eroding beach and sand
Snatching it back biting into the beach head
Perhaps the scream the hawking cry
The loon at midnight the peacock
In search of mate or calling to the sunrise
Perhaps the *Mad Woman of Chailot*
Perhaps *Mother Courage* subverted
Clock and hood hiding within
Her courage scorched withholding
Or holding her in place
Could have been worse

Fists and screams
Torments sounds
But no knives and guns
That came later
The next time around
That was a legacy
I married a guy with a gun
He had a Ph.D. from Harvard
He had a surly tongue
He locked doors to keep us in
He breathed our air
Told us not to stir
We didn't
The gun in the drawer
Just sufficiently ajar
To scare us keep us in place
She was as crazy as Allen Ginsburg's mother
Naomi but she was allowed to roam free
And named me Naomi
Ominous foreboding
But didn't follow her into Greystone
Lived outside the walls
Wailed deep inside never uttered a word
God what did I do
What have I done
Asking myself on the steps
Of the Cathedral of Saint John
Now my son has asked
As well I can see it in his face
He has done what I did
It is in our blood our bloodstream
We married blinded by time
Rushed to our destiny
Unquestioning my son and I
He was the first
She my daughter
Married eyes wide open
Simmering man
Inadequate man
Emotionally stunted
Stunning skier though
And can play dolls with daughters
Now comes the horror
Preface first
Got rid of man with gun
Not before destroying

Two teenage lives
Life without breadth
He also stole their air
All eyes fixed on him
His the only time
They lived below his boot
Das Kaptain Mein...
Sharing custody with a brute
An ogre a control freak
An autocrat as she
The maniac mother referred to him
There is humor here
Shed him hurt the kids
Damage sucking up their insides
This a generational plague
This a hereditary disease
This climbed in with ancestry
There were the good people
Victor Frankle said
The one's who shared even
A morsel of bread
To keep their brethren viable
Alive and then there were
The list sellers she was of that ilk
My mother and so my dear destiny
Was he, anything or anyone for survival
But you would think they wrote
The Bible to hear them speak
Words, we got the words
Next crept in seeped in
A viral contaminant
Husband two
He was a cipher and a poseur
So knighted and named by son
Number one – there is a second
Adopted from the rainforest
But that is another story
But there is an irony here
Betrothal to the female version
Though more deadly more of the world
This son married a scheming conniving
Temptress he knew her in a blink
He married in two weeks, I in three
With his father and so it goes
So it goes, no repose
Just recommitting ourselves to the sin

We carry the torch
The waters are muddied are murky
She is the mother of my three
Grandchildren and suddenly
I see that look in my son's eye
What have I done
What have I
God left off this time
He treats her as a difficult client
Kind and patient and detached
She is rapacious list selling
She is conniving she is a liar
She hasn't had an authentic moment
Except maybe behind a camera lens
She has a Pentax more than the diamond
Where do I go to make peace
Where do I go
Now that I know have seen
Where do I go to weep
What do I do to make whole
Life is trickling or rampaging away
I have moments or hours left
This according to an actuarial scale
I have moved over beyond now dead mother
Still she lurks and kicks up
Pain throttles my throat I choke
Now I have seen the end of
The universe mine
Jewish guilt how sublime
To feel that
We did not get out of the ghetto
Alive we did not transcend
Pogrom we brought our own on
Write speak truth to justice
Just no one look
Don't want to hurt
Expose our lives
To the scrutiny of others
Impaled by past poisons
They are the very breath I breathe
Inhale exhale beat my heart
What strength what truth what action
Death beats down on me like ginormous
(My grandson's age five favorite word) hale stones
I extract us from the belly of the whale
I will wait for Moby Dick

The sin bigger than any whale
Bigger than the Gulf oil spill
The poisons that live within Jews
Or of ancient history
Blood curdling
I poured the tar the poisons
I kicked on love
Until it drooped a dead
Flower in a vase
The contaminant in the water
The drip off my tongue
My saliva I did that
I destroyed love
The possibility of love
Still intrigued by my own defeat
My own troubled marriage
Gun in drawer cheater on loose
I told the girl kicked out
By frightened man child boy
She fled and never could say yes
He could never ask
Gun in draw
Now he has one by his bedside
His bride a menace
Forked tongued liar deceiver
She had the lists to sell
By now virtual or with other names
And claims she is as unworthy
She is his bride and wife
I stare blood curdles in my throat
My hand my finger on the gun
What have I done
What have I (God gone)
Shuddering in the aftermath
The splash of hatred rang out
Reached into his heart and life
The damage done mine this time
Caught in my throat
Bad words ran rancid
Putrid the up spill from my soar stomach
The legend of a bad man his father
Still a fascination a tributary
Grown swollen with time
I spilled on her our legend
I made the legend legendary
Hereditary now the spoils

I wrecked havoc
Stole chances for love
From my son
Whom I had groomed for love
Plucked from him just as
It was real this time
I didn't stop the plundering hand
His heart now
Torn and stolen by a very
Unworthy woman
What have I have we
Three children just bait
Their skin flakes in her rough hands
Madness too kind for me
No break from reality
Life gets more real
With the passage of time
How much more truth will I have to see
How much of the disease of life gone wrong
Can I tolerate
It is me It is I It is mine
The children she Daisy notices
My fleshy mushy arms
Why she asks herself
And answers because *she is old*
I face the barrel of the gun
I am the one who murdered this time
When will love come to any of us
Except in darkened corners
In dreams broke by day
In silent sneaked forays
It was about love
It was about the jagged cut glass
We could not mount the past
And go beyond
The Bible snapped us back
It seeped through the poisons
The past the damn broke
The wellspring of possibility
Still it is there to drink
As my sight fades
Behind its dusky lens of cataracts and time
The blossom of spring
Once bloom before my eyes
Break the bond of tyranny
Grab the kids find love

Chain her to her meager self
Her lying conniving scheming self
Better than everybody else
Let her languish in her disease
Walk toward what is pure
And uncontaminated
There is time there is always time
Go get your Virginia and
Kiss her hard smack on the lips
And betroth upon an eclipsed past
One last wish my eyes will not avert
I caused harm pain and suffering
I did because I refused to separate
Cut off those who siphoned
The very oxygen from me
We walk the rocks of torment
Gladly somehow believing
It signifies something
I am looking you
My death straight in the eye
I want to die
I am looking straight in the eye
I will break the bonds
What was done will be undone
By each grand child there are six
They will not ask
Why and how did we
The poisonous past
Within my grasp and gulp
I drink from the poisons of this well
Not a trickle will break free
That my legacy that their destiny – free.
The slow fuse of possibility (Emily Dickinson)

Naomi Barber
June 2, 2010

Love Like a Kite

Love like a kite
Just got away from me
Like a helium balloon
Just lifted out of my hand
Escaped my grip

My hold not tight uncertain
Balloons kites love
Dancing in and around clouds
Gliding with wind and breeze
Flying high away from me
Lost among tuft and fluff
Dispersing and gathering
My balloon didn't follow me
Like the *Red One*
And the boy in Paris France
My balloon swooped and soared
Swaying and tumbling and lifting
Kites and balloons in breeze or wind
Whim and whimsy dancers mimic
The graceful abandon
With which they dip and soar
Men or boys in my backwater days
Were captivated by something
They sensed
A powerful simmering passion in me
That never flowered or bore fruit
I was both dumb and numb
Killed off dreams with sun's rising
Remembering lost chances for love
Brings me widow's grief
I look back on the years
The elusive sea moving in and away
Leaving me
Without romance or love
Love left me disconsolate
Stillbirth baby
Without breath or heart beat
Love just never got it right
Knowing I shudder
Life spent unloved by another
Better to have loved and lost
How to console the bitter truth
Love just lifted away
From me on a scar filled day
Scar tissue past hurt metastases
Heaped on the doorstep of death
Breath easy truth released me
Straight in the face of death
No pretext or pretense
I confess that I will long
Until my last breath

Clearly a man probably John
Will come *Leda and the Swan*
And carry me off
A balloon a kite a girl
Twirl in a cloud-dispersing whirl

Post-script:

This truth I tell
I could not do both
Be a good mother
And a lover
I chose motherhood
Not noble but necessary
The day draws down
I go over each flaxen moment
No one to disrupt
No arms drawing me in
Reeking havoc with my body
Too toxic not to touch
Would yelp like a wild thing
Caught in a trap
Would erupt
Beyond Mount St. Helens
Most spewing and fiery

Naomi Barber
May 19, 2010

Love Like a Kite

Love like a kite
Just got away from me
Like a helium balloon
Just lifted out of my hand
Escaped my grip
My hold not tight uncertain
Balloons kites love
Dancing in and around clouds
Gliding with wind and breeze
Flying high away from me

Lost among tuft and fluff
Dispersing and gathering
My balloon didn't follow me
Like the *Red One*
And the boy in Paris France
My balloon swooped and soared
Swaying and tumbling and lifting
Kites and balloons in breeze or wind
Whim and whimsy dancers mimic
The graceful abandon
With which they dip and soar
Love cost me a heart beat
Love pulled me in at first sight
But no lover came
To carry me off or away
Or sweep me off my feet
No love came to claim me
Beyond protest or rationality
Coming close I let go
Just couldn't hold on
A loosened grip
Fear a visor
Kept me in place
And off they floated
Men or boys really
Captivated by something
They sensed
A powerful simmering passion in me
Never flowered or bore fruit
I was both dumb and numb
Killed off dreams with sun's rising
Remembering lost chances for love
Brings me widow's grief
I look back on the years
The elusive sea moving in and away
Leaving me
Without romance or love
Just too hard
To hold onto or imagine
Love left me disconsolate
Stillbirth baby
Without breath or heart beat
Love just never got it right
Knowing I shudder
Life spent unloved by another
Better to have loved and lost

How to console the bitter truth
Love just lifted away
From me on a scar filled day
Scar tissue past hurt metastases
Heaped on the doorstep of death
Breath easy truth released me
Straight in the face of death
No pretext or pretense
I confess that I will long
Until my last breath
Clearly a man probably John
Will come *Leda and the Swan*
And carry me off
A balloon a kite a girl
Twirl in a cloud-dispersing whirl

Post-script:

Truth be told
Rationalization or truth
I could not do both
Be a good mother
And a lover
Good wife not good enough
The men left
If I walked out
Choosing motherhood
I damaged my children
As I left
Repentant and reflective
At the close of each day
No arms waiting
To overtake my concentration
Sweeping me off uncaring
If I was a good mother that day
My body clamoring
Sound and thought obliterated
Opening up *Mount St. Helens*
At it's most spewing and most fiery

Naomi Barber
May 19, 2010

Lived in a time warp
A bubble
Mummified
Wrapped
In I can'ts
I won'ts
Died a million times
That was life
That was being alive
Bubble wrapped
Death mask
Dead as a doormat
Beyond sad
Old age
Got me seeing
How little
I did of living

NB 2013

We Couldn't Find Our Footing in Love

We couldn't find our footing in love
Overlay, history's measure
Love couldn't take root
The soil long depleted
Counterpoint, blasts of love
Moving our hearts
Like fine Tourneau workings
Held precipice
No way for toe or foothold
Expanse the range
History's lovers from
Cave drawing to Sappho poem
Picasso's twisted eye of brides
DeKooning women's twisted shape
Internal canvas bleeding
Love courses rooted our feet

Imagination reaching back
To tortoise Galapagos beach
Just beyond reach
Footing no ledge would hold
Fate's torment
Knowing love as if inventor
Scaling Himalayas
Mountain range soaring heat
Couldn't find a footing in love
Love imaginations fire
Alive to die, death finale
Restless heart, frightened heart
Desirous heart, denied heart.

Naomi Barber
February 9, 2010



Pussy Riot



omi and sophie 12 at deluxe.jpeg

omi and sophie 12 at deluxe.jpeg