



Negotiating With Objects

By Lisa M. Cole

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SUNDRESS PUBLICATIONS

For D.S. B., again; even though.
&
For M. J. This year, this un-yearning

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After Hiding

Listen: The body has a way of offering signs--
when her arm becomes a sword, a muted gun,
everything turns out wrong.

First, she enters this room, then another. But there are no windows—
no way out. She's locked--like a door, like a safe. She's hollow,
she's meandering again; listening to the steady static in her skull:
Sunday morning creeping like a nun; Sunday morning coming down.

She must become her own oracle
but she doesn't know: There is still time
to salvage this blue-colored day from all of these white-faced ghosts;
make a stanza with her body.

As usual, she is negotiating with empty objects:
the moving car, the wooden chair, the winding stairs.

Here is what she does know: ghosts
can only do so much. They have no hands.

After Dreaming

I

I'm so sick of all of these Goddamn birds;
the moon staring with her gigantic monster eye.

Everything pelican water. Everything
fin & flower.

II

Adam is dead & his ghost comes back—soothsayer. He flutters. He loves.
Then, snakes writhing out of ashes—hissing.

I am putting out fires with bottles of milk
& crying thundered tears.

He speaks to me with his second throat.
I want him to—

A golden trellis drops down from his hand & I
move--my mind-wheel.

I ask him, "How do I know this map is true?"
& I make my own water-sketch.

III

Every line: a tiny counterfeit dictionary.
This is what happens: a rusted fence.

After Emptiness

Because I will never have a daughter
& my heart is a rusting copper maze
I fold & falter. I only play a one-handed song.
The echoed horses tell me lies &
my ribs are wishbones.
I am a half-time widow.

The fates are confusing
in their signs &
the dead bring no news
for weeks. You say, "You look like
an artist right now." Grace
says nothing.

After Getting Lost

Grace says, “In all areas of life, she intrudes.”
Her black & white tassels glimmer off flowers;
her road love is ill-fated &
she has no sympathy for nouns.

My father says, “Lisa, this is north. And someday,
there will be no birds at night to guide you.”

All the time, the contours
of my life shift & my mother
is always there. My maverick, my mantra—
a sonic boom glowing.

After Lying

Because I am a maven of disaster,
I have hooks for hands, marbles
where my eyes should be. My
bloody boomerang heart in an hourglass.

When hysteria means brilliance
the girls with fevers are all glim & stutter
waiting like a plague, lying like dead
doves on fainting couches, in fainting rooms.

In the pantry, I find a photo of a jackalope and a
deck of cards with all the queens missing.

After Songs

I

There is no safety in numbers
& every space she enters--it is the first time.

II

I am the heavy daughter;
no pedestal, no shrine. The knowings,
the rememberings: loving
only two parts of a man: his songs,
his crown of idols. Look, passenger:
the mutiny of a poem dressed in skin—

III

My socket mouth abides. My life
unbidden, unbound—
See the seedless road.
Radio love & ransom notes
written on my arm—mime
& mage my way. My abacus hand
beclouds my protection.

IV

Tumult, tumult. Making, make. So:
I want to be on the page all of the time.

After Loving In Spades

At first,
I thought
summer—

because of the stillness
in the way you're a ribbon
wrapped around a bomb.

Too young to know better,
I become a stealer of similes & ripe oranges.
I am always turning

in on myself—trying again
to become someone else.
Then, glimpses of leaves

on the decision tree
again—falling.
So I love in spades & cry

Mayday when you
fall behind the mirror
& become a flickering sunburst.

After Asking

Well, there it is again: that damn penny moon;
that dirty crystal ball; a pearl; a child's flimsy kite
staggering drunk behind me.

She's a ragdoll, a magic 8 ball
I shake. What falls from the moon?
Reply hazy, try again.

I hoard calendars & sun dials
as if the year will heal us
& I spit sharpened stars into the sky.
But still—*Outlook not so good.*

Is love a ridiculous
kind of failure?
Signs point to yes.

After Playing the Thief

Because I only love minstrels; men with long hair;
men with beards; men named after Irish whiskey,
I steal what I want. I call it even—
even when it's not. I'm not very good at playing the moon.

"It's risky," he says. "Show me something risky."
Odd paramour. Odd spark. Let me be your Saturday girl.
"The light here is like a dreamboat," he says.
"I'm gonna mess it up," he says.

The city holds him like a womb &
girls are following him home again— from the hotel bar,
the smoky bowling alley, the nightclub,
but only when he refuses to say goodbye—only when he plays a thief.

After Alchemy

I

You hide yourself like a viper,
so I become both a bibliomancer & a skeptic.

This jading is all sigh & tremble;
all vanish, all vapor; all charm & fumble.

This venom, this equation of abandon
splashes into the chasm of ciphers &

this cleft of starlessness makes me a coward,
a fugitive. Then, a finder.

II

First, the chiming; then the embers fading from the photograph.
When I uncover my eyes, I become a blank bayonet.

I wish on helicopters; on kites; on trains.
I'm parched; all this revving & lashing out.

So I speak to all the corners of this room:
I am both gushing & empty.

I am willowed out, a fanatic. I'm all lime and languor;
all leash & superstition.

III

Too shaky to be of use,
I play a tired jester.

To rush & rush,
I become both a white sheet & a worried rifle.

You strut & pivot; I marvel at your spell books, your alchemy.
I am your naïve familiar.

All this time, & still—
I know the names for things but not their functions.

After the Ever-Glow

I

I have such awe for the wreck
in the small
witching hours.

II

A strange duet of signs:
The slant rhyme of my body—the nexus, the apex.
The arc of you around me: an ampersand.

III

Your heart saunters around in the wrong room
of your body's grimed house:
the under-hummings; the ever-glow.

IV

We sleep. We practice our deaths.
We stumble from the shifting pier,
unstable, unable to heave. *Glow glow.*

V

I see the stellar spell-book of your eye.
The click of your camera eye.
Soil your name. I will not.

VI

The hearse. The hearsay.
The hypothesis of your body:
a perfectly measured cake.

VII

To spite the abyss,
the days begin to take care of themselves.

After the Half-Penance

I

In this vision-scape,
I lose my wits, my wind-chime irises.
I forgo the sparks; the rhythm; the slumber

in favor of un-foraging you.
It is only a minor redeeming—
this fantastic mess.

Then, my insistent volition
disrupts the sky-scape.
Your half-penance in the postscript

is not enough. When the telling of it
is not enough. It is a compulsion—
this knotting—this hardening.

II

To brood & brood, *my dear*. Don't un-darling me:
relish in the turning over.

Harvest this epiphany, this peeling—
this slow unwrapping.

After the Amputation

Our bodies
have lives unknown to us.

See the pale, misguided earth of the body;
the shaky boat of the body.

The body an electric chair—
the body a wall; a mote.

The body a cello to be played
with only one hand.

To amputate the hand is
to panic the hive mind.

The hemlock mind;
the formless mind.

& I tell you:
what is formless matters less & less.

After Seeing

I

My fox mind looses himself
& his tail flutters out like a skirt over my single eye.

Again, I am half-phantom-ing--
my stuttering foot in a paperweight shoe.

II

To slate the sweet Halfling;
to *un-wife* me,
this fox's half-penny magic dreams me into seeing.

After Thundering

I

We re-bliss & then relinquish
these mornings—fresh but already withering.

We navigate by the hems & seams of the earth
& we become shaking manors weathering these precious thunderings.

II

This risk, this revealing,
this half-redemption speaks in tongues.

In this soiled box, a landslide of time's holding
uproots itself—& we revel in the splendid decay of our mouths.

After the Mothering

I

I will burn this grand year in effigy.
This vintage year, this year of un-yearning,
a year as round as a pearl earring in a vessel.

II

The shaming, this twisted gifting,
this slide & tumble, this
worry stone, (worry doll) body.

III

You are always with yourself—
the shine; the lie; this whirring.
A sudden need to exist in the peripheral, the perennial.

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