

## Still

The scar, plump as an almond on your wrist;  
the bowls of your nails;  
your blue bicycle against the pink wall of our room.  
Will they know it is hard to be angry with a man who  
    makes me laugh  
and that you know this?

I dream you old;  
I dream you suck clear soup from my spoon,  
spill blood onto our pillow.

I dream you stand in the centre of our house and  
sing to me,  
and all the magpies in the garden fall still.

## Speaking chrysanthemum

The specialist speaks chrysanthemum.  
All about his head, the window  
grins dumb, white.  
I remove my gloves, lay out my hands.  
He leans his elbows on his desk,  
rolls a pen between his fingers  
the way my mother would roll dough,  
the way I once could.  
His head is a shaggy explosion of light.  
When he squeezes each of my joints he names it,  
his breath beside me tough, measured and  
green as a plant. He speaks chrysanthemum,  
drops the odd word, unfurled, in my lap.  
I leave with a fistful of curt white petals. I speak but  
I don't speak chrysanthemum. I don't  
speak at all.

All the way home I smell them. Their  
pungency cuts a path into my head.  
Other people's houses hurtle by.  
The afternoon is mild and smiling.  
In the kitchen, you sniff.  
You take my fist, put it to your wrinkling nose.  
I won't open my palm.



Imagination is the enemy.  
When I was five, a steam roller came to make our street.  
Clay glistened behind it,  
perfectly flat fabric.  
It wasn't size or noise or even smell  
but flatness that sent me shrieking.  
I remind myself.  
There is so little of me between that day and this,  
my clothes a mere pocket disease slithers into.  
When I die, someone will fold them.  
Someone else will try them on.  
I'll slide away, a scrap of paper.  
Milk. Bread. A list of tasks.

Don't ask me to unclench my fist or eyes  
or any part.  
It is all I can do to contain myself,  
my borders all kicked over.  
There is mutiny.  
Even my bones can't tell enemy from friend.  
What future this war, war, endless war?  
I close myself and fight.  
I will fight myself to death.

## The boat

You are as cold and still as a stone.  
I will pick you up, press you to my face.  
I will pocket you.  
There you can be,  
a tiny thing,  
curved as a sleeping finger,  
a lock of hair, an idea.  
I made you once and I can remake you.  
When I take you out, you will feel my breath.  
I will sing you up and you will become a girl  
and you will be perfect and unafraid.  
I will put my hands to your skin and rib,  
I will put my hands in the place of your heart.  
I will press that place into its shape.  
You will have a heart.  
You will become heartbeats.  
I will put your own hand to your chest and say: here.  
I will cover you with blankets.  
I will make my arms as strong and curved  
as the hull of a boat that you, little and bloodied,  
can crawl into, and my breath the wind that sails us.  
I will sing  
I will sing you  
I will sing you so far out to sea.  
We will find another continent.



## Therapy like fish

He has eyes like a sky he wants me to fall into.  
On his wall is an illusion, an invitation  
a shutter that opens over miles of sea.

Squalls come and go all afternoon,  
light pales yellow and mauve, an old bruise.  
I doze and wake from dreams of a storm and a shuttered room,  
my tongue thick as a page.

Somewhere, I know, there are lines of notes.  
Oh, saviour, let me cut them up  
re-arrange them for you, into poems:

they. Will read. like suffering.  
Also. Sometimes I have. hated. you.  
At the beginning.  
All night. I think. of. edges. and  
how close. Can she. I get.

(For once – just once – hold out your hand.  
Let me touch you with one finger  
the way – did I tell you? – I was alone and  
someone touched me)

You are unreadable as the surface of the sea.  
Still I have seen the shadow of a single sentence  
swim a dark leviathan across your face.  
You are witness to the words I haul, one by one,

into the glistening palms of my hands.  
Such small offerings.  
How they twitch there, naked and translucent  
as fish.

How many times will I long to fall  
through the sky, into the deep pool of your arms  
to be weightless, still  
an unasked question?



## writer's subject

forgive my paradox  
of course it should be so:  
step through my door  
my myths my skin  
(each cell bloody with memory)  
as if my birth is not  
a miraculous random act

let me steep rose petals for you  
halve eggplants set yoghurt in a cloth  
& swing it in a window  
let me teach you how to dance  
& read you poetry by Tekeyan  
let me take you to my mother  
bring your questions your curiosity  
watch her creased brown hands  
work frantic at the patterns in her tablecloth  
watch her eyes meet yours  
full & brilliant  
with the most appalling courage

come bright postmodernist  
we are your writer's subject  
claim our borders as your own  
for what is truth?  
you are our turk  
exile us again  
again  
we will march for generations into mesopotamia  
our family shod like horses  
& let loose

## an astronomer speaks to his wife

I once  
a botanist I know  
told me he was  
using small blue-handled scissors  
cataloguing photos of his wife  
the bikini shot  
the wedding  
birth  
the first ride on a unicycle  
face to face with emus

when he was interrupted  
by his children & their  
tearful holding out to him  
a gecko they had stepped upon

he took it gently on his palm  
saw  
with his swift eye  
its mortal injury  
the impact of their shoes upon its skin  
its slow work  
the tremendous hauling of itself  
saw too  
his children's faces  
turned towards his faith in science  
so  
with as much care as  
that with which he gathered specimens  
he snipped the gecko's head  
clean from its body

2 truly  
my love  
I am simply a photographer  
each day I search my negatives for  
pattern & for roguery  
& each clear night  
record again  
the data of our isolation

I know  
that sometimes you wish I just made tea  
that a spoon of leaves was  
only that to me  
that I didn't hold it  
out to you & say  
this much dark matter  
is as heavy as the world

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when bees see blue  
they think it is the sky  
rush headlong in  
heavy for paradise

are my eyes a trick of swarming light?  
your pulse drones in my ear

the summer you first come home  
it rains for days  
we turn the house lights on  
we wipe our brows  
all those towelling squares drag on the line  
the whitest things for miles  
ahead roads bow over hills to sea  
behind land slips wide & treeless  
all day here your legs kick from us like questions

in this suburb women say  
babies are born with blue eyes  
light swarms those summer days  
convexed against yours shocked and black  
two planets shifting endless in your head

where we live  
the gate to paradise is widest  
this southwest sky's ablaze with it  
each day you come home scorched red-cheeked  
& kick again  
legs too heavy now for bliss

you study the order of bees  
their anger welts your throat like keening

we search the possibilities of paint  
the neat squared hues that  
multiply like skin grafts  
your origamic fingers shift  
these colour charts for days  
unfold a blue more shocking than the sky

our house looms bright and planetary  
the neighbours pass  
continual and silent

you catch in my throat  
a long blue note that  
plummets from me