

Liz Waldner / TWELVE POEMS

YEW-BERRY

A mouth of round red flesh around it
The private green seed a tongue inside it

The house holds the finger of its yew
Before its eye.

There's a shade for night
And a taken-away for the light of the day.

This is the lived in prayer.

Each morning, dutiful, the taken-away.
Every evening, blind.

The house mashes me to its mouth.
Between its fingers seed comes out.

SUNDAY, NO PEIGNOIR

Much that is hidden shall be revealed — Matthew 10.26

A word, to put a word on the tongue of the morning
that will become my body and blood
in its blue mouth, in its green veins
to run a clear sap between earth and sky . . .

Wanting that much
with address of flesh, of bone, to be remodeled
that much to address any world without sin
to wear it well, the mantle of self,

much, that — well . . .

ANOTHER PRAYER AND WHERE IT CAME FROM

The trees cathedral.
Locust chant.
Rain articulates its prayer.

I am here
in a damp chair.
There, what do you do?

Lie on your back, your eyes closed.
Feel the moving air.
Yes, I am composing you.

I move my chair so I can see
the big white dead tree
I need in this green
vault of heaven
to bring it to bear
on my composition.

Yes, this is prayer.
Hear, O Israel, and not:
All grass is green
and flesh is grass
and bones and words
are white and turn
to green. Yes,
and turn to air.

PRO(VERB) (RE)CREATION IN THE TIME OF AIDS

A dog is barking behind me and I
think of its open mouth.
A wind lifts the leaves and they
shift like their shadows.
A spider disturbed swings on its silk.

My new hat is full of dust.
It is dangerous
but I believe above me
I hear the tree making its leaves.
My heart burrs briefly.

The wasp measures the door and leaves.
Soon you'll come and open it.
When you do, some dogs will shut their mouths
thinking sometimes it is better
not to have had their day.

EXHIBITS A

Doubt is spun, a strand, it drifts, faint and catches
A line is drawn across the field of vision
Crosswalk, double cross, valor, honor
Cross hairs in the gunsight, cheap talk
A fat cross man, a hot cross bun, a double lock

The sky a diagram, the eye a pentagon, milk fortified
On the exit ramp from the interstate, a shoe in the margin
The empty room, its door latch, catch in the throat
Gethsemene, the fool on the hill, the catch at Galilee
A shifting of the loaves, a floury light among the leaves

The way through the trees of his life blocked by a lion
The pendulum in his pants marks ample reasons
Dante's progress clocked by seasons
After the Fall the spider bobs the littlest bit
Silk stretches from star to pit

DARK TIMES

The flickering shadows of leaves.
The prayer of a fly with red eyes.

The star chart made of a leaf by a worm.
With a mandate from heaven in its heart.

The archaic song *Continuo*.
Percolates through the throats of birds.

The plant spines curved in arcs like sun's.
The sun swung leaves by stems.

The glimmer of water in candle basin.
Registering presence with sky and eye.

Deduce.

Let the syrinx song.
The star shadow.

PERSIAN STANZAS

How to advise those who, for a long time, believe stones are faithful? Love, grace saved from the censure of Great Day, do not deny me the names. I am a narrow vessel, a star asleep on its daybed. I have been such a long time in the night, your arc of tenderness a ploy, keeping me against the day when the inflection of the body should be entirely the late shrug of your shoulder, an accent too grave to alter the meaning of my sleep.

The good death is a package wrapped in somebody else's name. Give me your word you will send back all the stones to their places, all the stories, estuaries of water lilies, hyacinth all along the stairs' descent to terrible childhood. A dead yellow dog and a bicycle pedal — wrap them back up. I have them already.

Tonight the night itself is a cross across which crosses are drawn. Yesterday I saw long the shadow of a young tree kept in the trunk of an older. What have I done? If only *every shadow entailed a sun* . . . Foregone; let the avenger pass over.

Rest in what menaces, heart. Call out the names. Let the traces of tears be the trees of salt that root the night sky. Call each root Star. Call each star Forgiveness. Call Forgiveness the diurnal fruit of Great Day.

FEAR AND SUCKLING AND THE MIRRORING UNTO DEATH

. . . which alters when it alteration finds

Two calcium clouds have appeared in the sky
of my fourth finger's nail.
The fourth finger of my left hand means to me
the sound of the letter 'L'.

As I write this 'L', a big wind blows
and leaves leave the trees sideways.
Trying to stay, I adjust my glasses.
I pour linden (the lost love's name for me)
honey and a Chinese herb into my tea and see
in its dark mirror the red-orange teeth
of the tiger-lily dying in its day.
The mirror moves when my hand moves
and so do the teeth and the day.

I move when you move.
Take my hand and see.
Put my clouds in your mouth.
Still me.

Tell me this way
Love is not a talent.
Suck. Correct my vision.
Still me.

OF UNKNOWING, THE CLOUD

In the morning would the white
cat nose the tall grass
along the driveway.

Careful not to touch, knowing
at a distance. Smell the synapse
as is the green thing springing
forth from the earth
also good to smell.

In the morning would the white
cat carefully
go its nose naming along
in the morning. It would, yes,
it did go. And in the morning watching
she thought this: it is important to remember
there is really no certain way
to be. What she wanted
to think is: I'm allowed.

ENCODE, *ENFILADE*

And you who sleep in the vast rooms of dreams,
will you allow us one evening to read
those letters affixed to the walls
of one room? A crucifix

with its beautiful feet
might be an I, its text the object
of suffering's sliver: to work itself
out. Like the candle at your bedside now.

MÄRCHEN, TRUCKIN'

We are sitting in our truck in Tivoli next to the laundromat where a load of whites hasn't made it to rinse yet and it occurs to us that this is the moment hoped for, referred to, suggested by, so many moments before when, reaching into the ashtray for turnpike change, my fingers were pricked like poor Rapunzel's lover by the thorns of a thousand upturned tacks. Well, a dozen. Diabolical, if someone thought it up, a spurned lover maybe, but I did it myself (goodbye, "we," contamination from *The New Yorker* pulled out of a recycling bin while waiting for other laundry to dry back in Boston); last things out of the apartment in Corrales, they've been riding around in the ashtray almost two years now. Once, hot and thirsty through Utah and Nevada all summer, I stuffed a rented car's ashtray so full of pits from the box of dates on which I'd spent the last of my food stamps, I couldn't get them out or close it when I returned it. They gave me my \$300-no-credit-card-deposit back: they were either kind or had no eye for detail at the airport in Albuquerque. I guess I get to decide.

So it is the moment to pick out the tacks, practicing thereby the manual dexterity an aptitude test picked up twenty years ago in Atlanta but instead, as you can see, I've picked up my pen because all morning I've been hearing a voice saying something about *I, your own personal vision of loveliness . . .* and it was going to do something and say so but I forget what, so here I am in my truck on a Saturday morning in July, a sparrow yelling in

the passenger side window, me writing on a 1950s notebook from a drugstore in 1970s Mississippi that features helpful, if obscure, tables on its pale yellow back cover (4 gills make 1 pint, 10 dollars make 1 eagle, 20 grains make 1 scruple), slipped under the steering wheel and balanced on my thigh, again with no or any where to go. I guess I get to decide.

I suppose it should have been Snow White with her finger pricked by a spindle and not Rapunzel with her lover lying with his eyes poked out in the briars below. But Snow White sickens, she's so sweet or Disneyfied, and the tower is one big prick, besides; these brambly blue words all look prickly, too, because last night, my true love was not true, and I'm afraid no other will blind my eyes.

THE LAUNDRESS MAUNDERS II

Laundromat, laundrymat, here we are again. Agayne. Imagine spelling your name Jayne. Imagine a small disaster with a red wagon is now taking place on a sidewalk near you. The boy, he says she made him break his back. Stand up and arch your back like this, is what she says to him for him to see if it is broken. He does. A cat sits on the sidewalk, watching. One ear swivels. The injured party does not cry. He bleeds from one knee. A mother is fetched, observes the bleeds. This party of three departs for the laundry, accompanied by a giant noise: wagon wheels on concrete.

A man on a motorcycle carries a green bucket. A man in a golfing hat walks with three women. Two are fat. His shirt is green. As long as I am busy telling, I can hope to be allowed to be. He told me his dream of minefields to prove being around me is like being in one. My heart and my stomach sank. One of three beer bottles on a slanty window sill falls by itself. A t-shirt tag sticks up like a tongue on the neck of a man who appears on roller blades to inspect. He puts it back up on the slanty sill. A black dog and a woman come out his door quick.

The black dog is happiest to be. Expensive white cars go by, three. Two white butterflies dance the dance of DNA. After he said I was neurotic and gave his convincing evidence, I put a deck chair in the driveway and looked at late evening clouds above the trees. A whole parakeet with its eyes closed was one feather of the wing of another. I see what this means. A cloudy tabby stretched out in mid-pounce arched above me. Better I live in the middle of nowhere and hang my laundry to dry on trees.

