

Black Garden

a collection of prose poems

by

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BLACK GARDEN

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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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And to you, CB—in your own words, I dedicate the whole serpent to (all of) you.

A WORD ON WANDERING AND THE PROSE POEM

Poetry is a conversation that is always occurring around a dinner table. Someone is coming in late and attempting to enter the current discussion. After the new guest is well acquainted with the party, she feels comfortable enough to upend the conversation with her own wild ideas. The dinner goes on, we are still eating the same things, and yet, they taste different.

This collection aims to be part of the dialogue surrounding the prose poem and poetic prose. I should only be so lucky to dine with Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Anaïs Nin, Henry Miller, John Ashbery, and Bernadette Mayer. *Black Garden* is speaking with these authors, among others. I am the guest who has just arrived. After paying my respects, I begin to ramble on with new thoughts and questions.

It would be easy to say the prose poem facilitates openness, that it is a rejection of obedience to form and tradition. It would be easy to say that a prose poem is like an indecisive child standing in the doorway with one foot on the porch and the other in the living room. I am not a scholar, and hate the idea that I might explain anything important outside of a poem, but I believe the prose poem aspires to more than just genre bending.

If I were writing a textbook for students of the prose poem, I might begin: It was really about wandering. Or: 19th century Paris forced its writers to adapt to a changing landscape. Both of these are true. The newly renovated Paris with its grand boulevards made it difficult for writers to get lost in a labyrinth of narrow cobblestone streets, happening on some strange subject for inspiration.

The prose poem is also a shift in landscape. Images which are dispersed across the page in a lyric poem suddenly get thrust up against each other like lovers in a prose poem. A prose poem waits for no one to give it directions; it turns down any street, feeling immensely purposeful in its ambling.

In *Black Garden*, I work with ideas of illness, drunkenness, sex, poetic creation, and the city, which I wander through, happening upon unexpected images or thoughts. This collection is broken into four sections. Each section expresses a different way of seeing and a different approach to connecting the poem's body to the human body and the body of the landscape. In exploring the possibilities of this genre, I offer up my own contribution to the great Prose Poem Dinner. I invite you, my readers, to join me at my table.

“Which one of us, in his moments of ambition, has not dreamed of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical, without rhythm and without rhyme, supple enough and rugged enough to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul, the undulations of reverie, the jibes of conscience?”

It was, above all, out of my exploration of huge cities, out of the medley of their innumerable interrelations, that this haunting ideal was born.”

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

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**POEMS TO THE READER
OF THE POEM**

I.

We are in the Library's black throat.

I am recommending spines to you—I remember the poem before I sent it off, covered in feathers. The poem is something received in a box. The Library, full of watching, opening packages—I remember eating cherries here.

Dear Postmaster,
I wanted to be sure to reach you.



The question sits like a face in a lap—what does the offering bear?



Just the one time, I hit you—are you listening? The line forms now, spilling against the grain. For some reason—nevermind—but I am carving all the stones in the wall. We are both becoming fleshier.

II.

This is a real poem, beginning inside a book of matches. If I stopped here and did not say sincerely, would you still receive this? I dreamed I was running to the postbox—body sliding along the ground—the address suddenly a whole hand reaching up.



We are separated by this paper, but we are also in the room together.

You reach in, I'll reach out.

III.

This is a black poem. Egyptian cotton is gladly picked in Egypt as a black poem is gladly covered in blackbirds, dug out of a black November. The poem is being pulled from the black earth, clacking.

IV.

I collect all the syllables of the Library—

I am at the door knocking and knocking.



Ink caked in the corners—we must have planned this, the stalling of a big car. We don't know the man who bought the railway car that sits on his front lawn like a red thumb. A certain slant of light—the woman stays in the house and loves her neighbors. She plants Siberian irises, writes a long letter, is full of fresh air—my mother or Emily Dickinson.

We couldn't have planned this, but my body is smaller than the nurses said it would be—like real poetry, snatching away.



A poem surpasses birds. The same empty room, a mouth full of black feathers. The poem is interested in finding you—there is a voice, and now, ladies picking cotton and flowers.

V.

Here we go—the poem is fluttering with your breath. The book is breathing with half-grown poems.

Breathe, poem. Breathe, breathing. The poem doesn't end here—I'll prove it to you. When you fall asleep tonight, you are dreaming the same dreams as the poem. You are dreaming of being alive, and cannot stop thinking how there is always a first, and it's the most beautiful thing because everything else is shaped from it.

The poem isn't over, because tomorrow you will make breakfast. Tomorrow you are cracking white eggshells, and white poems come out.

VI.

I cannot say how it happened, but the poem is howling. It starts with nothing, then the poem is etched, the poem is inked, the poem is printed again and again.

That is all, the poem is a cosmology.



William Carlos Williams used books to prop the wobbly table leg—that was the beginning. I am trying not to be vague, and so: people are housed by books.

VII.

The book is a window with four panels—

Red: You are not looking out, but looking in. There is a couple going at it, making a business of it. They are coming to the best part, the whole red room is swollen. They are both having the same shade of red dream, each that the other is dead so they might know what their love amounts to. The walls are red, the room is a red cove, the redder the mood the redder the flesh. The reddest part of her is even redder now—he enters with his red urgency.

Green: You are waiting for the scene to play out. The image is collecting itself, and as it forms, it is only a recombination of still more shattered images in the same sick green. He is wearing green clothes, operating, greening you. You are getting older.

Peach: Before you can look, the world inside the panel has been happening for thousands of years. It might convince you to break the other panels, and you are afraid because it knows you, because it is like sex with someone who is always naked for everyone else. Peach skin—you want it and so you are afraid to look.

Gray: At first, it is ugly. Then you discover that you aren't seeing through it but only the surface. It is reflecting me holding you tighter until there is only one face looking back.

VIII.

You have a good, clear head. Your hair is clean and dripping, the poem is clean and dripping from its corners onto you. I am cornered inside the poem, and I am in love with you because you bloom me. Love is shaking in the ground—the poem must be planted. The poem is shaking, sucking water through its roots.

You are walking around living and so what if I don't know your address or the size of your shoes so what I love you here is a piece of paper I covered for you.

I will tell you where I am sitting—but first, the language is just as much me. For the sake of the Library, you must keep reading! The bones of the Library grind together—it is winter but no snow is falling—wait—snow falls in the book and you are cold, reading.

This is the moment of meeting. We sit on the brink together. So I am perhaps dead—so what—I am talking to you. We are touching. The Library is hurling rumors from other worlds. Through the window, which is also the book, you can see everything worth seeing.

IX.

I have hung around here long enough to build an artists' colony. Heat a house with oil or heat it with poetry. What is evening but the strange cold of approaching punctuation?

I have read all the best poems until tomorrow—you say something about desiring more footholds in the syntax. I might write just one very easy poem.

See, I am startled—the almost tusk-white dust collecting around a black mountain, white paper collecting around a black poem. I walk well enough to listen. I can find the most important stars by looking at Cassiopeia—what a miserable woman. She can't say she didn't like it—she could have chewed off her own ankles to get out.

X.

When I first saw the prisoner, his feet nailed to a plank, I thought, well, it's hard to set an idea in stone. Over the years, a few birds coming across the sea—someone remembers seeing the prisoner too and wrote a book about it. Enough women have died for the crime of seeing.

I do not desire to be a woman, but a poet. Once, I was mistaken for a woman—No, I said, I am a poet. I can wrangle a whole flock, tell them anything, and set them free anywhere.



I am looking past the hem of the sun at you.



I am straining in a bone-castle underground—wanting to reach you, writing not only to fit myself into the Library. I want you to know, I meant what I said, the part about the poem being pulled out of the earth—

It lives for you.

VIOLENCE FROM WITHIN

IF I HAVE COME THROUGH

I contain the unseen. A call from the doctor is a call from any doctor—more not knowing. I sit in the red chair or on white butcher paper—doctor's voice dripping through—nothing collects in me. Records faxed, tubing connected, all sheets washed white. I come out slow from behind a black corner.

EACH WHITE LIMB FIGURES

If I die today, I will not be naked, pressed to the ground by a birch tree. I am bracing myself with true things other writers have said about women. When I recover, I will be beneath my own white sheet, waking suddenly, heart ballooning up. How much will come out?

I am afraid of overhanging, breaking glass on the floor tile. To say something is broken is to lift it out from its purpose. When I write about you, I lift you out of yourself, thieving—how similar giving pleasure is to taking. There is a glimmer I follow and then the release, ink hits and order follows. I remark, the terrain changed while I was under—needles always perform their pointed orders, and I, an image of extending myself in parts.

VIOLENCE FROM WITHIN

For Wallace Stevens

My hand cannot be my own—a lion paw. Trying to hold a pen, but disease is fragmenting. A poem not my own is spilling out my fingers and the ends of my hair. I am not writing, but living inside it, body ripped red.

What response? I am half-sleeping, seeing myself outside. It's all going wrong, I am turning the room red. Bleeding on the sheets, coughing up blood and language. There is something bad inside. My head fills with red and it is pouring out my eyeholes. No one I love comes to see me off. They are afraid of me.

THE ECONOMICS OF BONE

A sense of movement—clutching—slapping down—bones make liquid syllables—and if I—I may be taken—sore and uncurled—it drives past—no diagnosis—I imagine the tissue—eaten—my jaw full of slack—I write—no position for comfort—this collection—a great text box—from hand to wrist to arm—even to write—not enough—hinging—it is silver sharp—cut open—spilled on the table—how—my father in a text book—no one will take me—standing shrunken up—rate your pain today—another capsule—sticky purple organs—kept on file—only I am looking out my eyeballs—doctor supposes—his secretary hates me—a pair of black boots with red stains—roaming—searching—a loop of keys at the hip—hand outstretched—sleeping—screaming—waking up to him taking notes—on file—on hand—fully staffed—pulling out the scissors—a doctor is only a mound of green.

THE BRILLIANT GIANT TOY
WITH SUCH SOFT-OILED HINGES

I give up occasions and persist on with unwieldy bones.
If I were to catalogue pigeons, a white one today with a
black splotch around the eye—I said she was beautiful,
she—and why that whiteness calls out female? On the
market street, the whitest flesh, so much whiter than
ice beneath and next to the salmon pink. And behind
me, the man with saggy earlobes selling books—three
books in English, all mystery. I did not read mystery as
a child—I spent years reading past my own smallness
and femaleness and whiteness. In the background, a
pen has run out of ink. A man licks the tip as he may
lick a woman. He shakes it as he may shake a woman.
Not much today—eggs at the tall table, apple juice
on rue Monge, and now all the rain. Here, the sky a
cool white even past nine. Hours past this, I dream
myself a monster. I tear my own scales and the tiling
of roofs. If I see myself, it is only in parts—my thick
monster feet or the purple tip of my monster tongue.

THE ORDER OF SLEEP

Body in a box arrives and it is me.

Sleep-sounds of my interior are scored by someone unseen. No release yet—the day will strike from an intercom. There is one door in the white room, and all the doors opening in me. No release yet, and how to push it out. I am not a method, but they are finding something out, disordered. My body is done. A body fit to be born, not to sleep.

The doctor says I am dreaming to hide from disease. The dream happens to take me from my body. There are no windows in the room, dreams get caught in the corners. The voice comes, admits morning. Lights on, something is burning—some wire unattached, some switch pulled—burning, my own wired scalp.

They are talking about me. I address myself, saying what a nice brown bed. There is a sensor in front of my nose and mouth to make sure I keep breathing. I am attached to the room, resounding. My body, a tree being tapped. No one is listening enough—I am trying to lie, to stop breathing.

Wire to throat. Wire to chest. Wire to cheek. Wire to scalp. Wire to scalp. Wire to scalp. No one is listening. The nurse is talking about her son, my mother is eating a cup of soup. The voice comes. The voice says to blink. This, of course, is being recorded. I tell myself, well, enough. Thinking, I am well enough with a pen, well enough to sleep alone. Later, I am in the bathroom removing all the wires from my face. Everywhere, the pearly goo remains, takes days to rinse clean.

HIS SOUND WAY OF SLEEPING

I am by the closed window and the hot, white shade. I write this the way someone might drive to pick up milk—I have seen all the love and all the deadness. Looking at you now, barefooted on the tile, shifting, nothing sinks in. It is all inky, blackish on the surface.

We unwind and recoil against each other. I forget how to get to you, and so boil the little kettle, so lap chamomile from the blue bowl, so turn away and tamp down. The red night passes between facing backs.

WAITING IN THE ROOM

Before: there is a gorge in me—the idea of depth, digging into the poem, into the body. The vacuum of the waiting room holds me, an incompetent bridge-maker, a trap snapped over air. When I reach my hand to the doctor, I am reaching a shadow into still more blackness. The body in fractions, the dreams I haven't had yet.

I am waiting in the room. Some limb of mine has stretched into the grave like a gutter.

THE TUB

She looks like she wants it—the woman bathed bronze, light clung here. Her chin bent up and a hand reaching past the edge. If I were bronzed, how my eyes would press past the bowl of my body. The disk tub—the woman, fishlike, with tail and head flopped out. She could be any corpse with the light dug from her. She, a brown bulk, all the same bronze inside as outside, with her wire bones fastened in repose—she wants it. The eyeholes like hollows for planting—unfilled, clenched up—she, not leaving, but waiting. Where to wait for the eventual but in a disc around which faces drift. Her body is coiled in the tub, unaware of what orbits, examining itself and all the carving that makes her.

THROUGH THE ENTIRE DEGAS EXHIBIT,
I THINK OF YOU GETTING OUT OF MY TUB

Degas would have loved you even with your scoliosis and maleness. How easy taking you to bronze, finding contrast in folds and angles. When we walk any gallery, say, Versailles—and why not—the horrible tomb filled with bodies stacked against each other—it is not what we have seen that holds us. What might be ours instead—that statue of Apollo is in fact your favorite uncle and that urn is a rather elaborate urinal. And why not—how else to make it through so many mounted bodies.

Here is a dancer now, or a man drying himself, or a statue emerging from white bone-rock. You are in the morning of the bath, more real than the woman who keeps her face from us. In the gallery where you have not come, every bronze lump reminds me of something chopped out, dismembered. Reminds me of all Dali's bronze—he and I hallucinate colors and patterns before sleep. Here, a woman dries one hip, but you have dried both my hips and sudded them with cinnamon soap, bronzing the tub floor.

A bath together and the water full of rose—nothing to smell from nude bathing in charcoal on pink paper. Every expanse of a woman's spine may have been planned by Degas, and no one planned you, but here you are, you stretch—here, man drying after bath, hair too short to brush.

Degas plays on shape, see, round buttocks on round stool, square gashes on round knee. After the bath, the woman always with a towel, always turned away. I would reach into the paper and turn her around. A basin is rendered as a body too may be rendered, fighting its own flatness with the same notching out. The woman taken unawares still hides. How you would find Dali's Alice with her head of flowers more wonderful, exposing all angles.

At the end of the show, Degas is seated, examining a sculpture not his own—how like us. Degas could have cast you, bronze legs bent toward me. There are some angles I have not seen yet, but when the nude dries himself after the bath, he looks to me with notches of sun in his bronzing skin—if I could make you from any angle, this angle—face rendered in openness, this angle—the nude chiseled from air, dropping his towel and walking out the doorframe toward me.

THE SPECTACLE

HIS IDOLATRY, HIS WARM HUMAN LOVE

The memory begins with perfume.

First, the freeing of instinct, his gestures more animal. Henry's strong hands, his mouth like an inquiry. In me, there is the impetus to grow against him and bear the blunt, becoming more brutal. I am lapsing into cycles with men, terrifying them—the extent of my appetite.

He is building a city from me.

I fell from somewhere else, but my mother is my mother. I am winging out from the apartment. All the birds in me, the birdfeeder—this occupies me. To shoulder, to drop like amid-air I advanced upon this world but can still perch myself on those men, be obtained.

He has a love of ugliness.

He holds his post in the silent skirmish, as if the last man. Yielding, I am wrought, but the quakings cannot be rendered. Yielding, filled—mounting, rising—spent inside his morbid imagination. He is leaving me again for the manuscript, reporting on sex like a surgeon.

SONNET

For him, I become a harp on my back, thrusting out in golden syllables. He enters every poem, grafting himself to me. The bedpost is an apparition we are reaching toward, coming up with only dreams. Here, an alchemy in the sheets, someone not me emerges at night.

Consider this a performance where I consent as loudly as the first time. We are thrashing to understand each other, he admits. We are poor together, our hands are filled with flesh. He opens all the windows, possessed by the air.

Here, a creek in my torso. The apartment exists from our legs, spinning out across the poem of the morning. He transmits himself louder every time, until there is nothing outside the apartment. He is in everyone I see, my eyes full with his body.

I make the sound of a child. It is an ideal or a vibration he doesn't hear, but it is already in the air, and he records only the part he wants.

I HAVE BEEN EJECTED FROM
THE WORLD LIKE A CARTRIDGE

I hold him, little Henry, between myself and experience—he is heir to a life I do not understand and overcomes to lay with me. We interrupt ourselves in the morning and hurry along—this is not a bond that explains itself. Henry in my mind, in my stomach—his exertion revives me. We drink the same and sit far enough apart—the company he keeps is largely male. He wears me when we are alone, and how I have slept in much of my clothing and the tremble.

To reach forward, my hold no more than the winter holds the whitebirch. I will bear. I am a visitor here and would still open myself to him as a seedpod opens. I am a visitor in my own experience and Henry lights a match, leaves his jacket on the floor. There is no prominent hall in this place. All the furniture in his room is covered—myself amid the sheets.

THE SPECTACLE

A whole evening tolerant in the red room, the tango. The shock of a window, the fog through which each violet and black and grey suit looks, holding a woman beside him or a woman hidden in green sequins or a big feast of a woman. They hired a man just to slice the limes. Henry's kiss—he is off across the room again or across the ocean again, leaving his wallet on the table. How this whole evening, the whole spectacle, changes—a picture of me in a little leather pocket with my dark blackish eyes. The street didn't drain last year and isn't draining this year—elsewhere, the moon is red. The debris of night waded through, the room narrows and we are walking to his apartment. In the morning, he has gone to buy coffee and oranges and more candles—I gave him my typewriter, he seems not to sleep. When he returns, the oranges have little green leaves still attached and he lets me wear his clothes. They fit me—I appear not as a man, but a child. Henry invites a contortionist, a blue scarf coiling an artist, a prostitute in a gold dress, and his editor to dinner in the small, white kitchen. The brown table is round, we sit close enough that the prostitute's yellow hand flops on my thigh. There is a cup that must also pass for both of us. Henry sold the blue glass cups I bought him in Switzerland for Japanese paper and cigarettes and now he's talking about growing up under apple trees and the pocketknife with the good bone handle given to him by his psychoanalyst and all the colors of apartments in Paris in blue and white and off-white and light blue and beige and blue-green and again he tells the story of the male prostitute with one arm and a crown of yellow roses who took him to a Russian café where he ate beets and cabbage and woke up in one of many great apartments so seemingly on stilts with his mouth wide open. Welling up into the rafters, we don't mind our own business, drunk on good Merlot. The river sustains the city, river chained to city, Henry chained to typewriter. Forget it, another haze the following day and Henry pushing into me breathing out in bad French grammar. The first shock is he rips the sink from the kitchen—I sleep next to him, saying nothing in any color, no changing the sheets. The next, we are eating dinner alone in the white kitchen. And finally, when he writes me in, my face is a small white nothing—I exist only to wait. In a hundred years, scholars talk about my face saying, she is a woman or a child, saying, she is waiting, saying, the narrator writes a letter to her she never receives on white paper and how interesting is her quite black hair, saying, how jealous she is of the apartment and its own astonishing becoming.

Henry says the character is immaculate and asks me what I think of her small featureless face, but I am already out of earshot and into the next room.

BACK INTO HIS VITAL ARMS

I.

One difference perceived becomes a whole pond—Henry's temper feeds it.

We are drowning in the apartment. The shore closes in—I forget the others immediately, but see Henry everywhere. Consider this a tableau where one body says to the other, we are sitting in sounds. What might be given to a man and what might be taken—we are leaking out, unable to move from each other. No one else dares enter with their awful shaking hands.

II.

Henry, I love you, but the same faults cut in. On the same tree, the lowliest branches.

What a word might have been before it shuts with a snap.

III.

Before nesting, he makes a proposition. Henry, more human in one way only—the first to know music. His ears, the only points connected outwards. He tried to listen, to reconstruct me, coming up with handfuls of white flowers.

Sounds bear more burden than the black letters he makes. On the train to Nice, I saw a new blue button on his coat—such a hush building in us. He tried to read me, but never to write me. I make a bad character with my strange, thin fingers.

We get lost in our own drumming down. It starts with his big mouth sounds, and ends with a movement that could sit inside a kettle. I am searching for a man who will clean my cup as well as his own. It starts with his mouth, and ends with a whirr fit for an insect.

IV.

A partial, opulent night. He thrusts open doors and connects all the rooms, trying to let words pass into him. The love of stirring—Henry, like art, is made to an end. I lose him here on paper, our voices winging out. My ears are collecting and sorting him.

Standing on what has heaped up, finding sand in the desert—my own sound spent in the bed. There is more in my body than he uses. If he heard what he wanted, it is not from me.

No one will take me without slippers on, hushed.

V.

I have stopped planning with him, still, an appetite in his arms. Like a wife, vibrating in emptiness—uttering nothing—Henry dropping on me. Proposing to the world in costume, his ironed shirt collar. He furrows at the uses I have found for the bed, now full with sounds.

Our young ears hear everything we want.

Poison on the way home, returning to the same place. He is a good man, but all I can think is he didn't wash the dishes, I asked, but he didn't wash them. Henry recalls what he wants, confined in his own late hours. I love him—clinging to him at Gare St. Lazare, telling myself, I need to get the sleeves off my wrists. The train is not satisfied, pulls away—out of any window, more air.

Everything is rocking, flowing carelessly from him. He forgets the course, even that he knows me—Henry—please—to commit myself—to run naked to the window, even when you will not come.

VI.

He is heavy-faced, tapping on books, reeling under the white sheets. Henry, not mine, I fell asleep again. We may be aflame, on our knees, without any real noise. Of everything involved in loving him, I hate most the black pleasure in his ready voice.

**FROM THE ARCHIVES
OF DEBAUCHERY**

It is the same thing, Paris, and the iris of each eye.



The Louvre is built and they took away the extra stone slabs. It's all happening at once, the wheat growing up between the stones, the Louvre built and being built. We find a dream at the same place as an apartment. The body is a tool to protect the poem, the Louvre protects the idea of housing. The eye is a tool to protect faith, as the iris protects the garden. Before writing about Anaïs Nin, I find out what flowers she grew.



To be in love with an artist—seeing a portrait of you hung up, you walking out on the terrace among red petals, you emerging from the tub wet haired—an almost mirror of you. Him, taking a whole fistful of hair back down to earth, proving he knew you. Making a swipe at the city like this in swatches, she never sits for a portrait. It is all the same poem, or the gridwork for seeing—the morning of the poem and the morning after. I am coming to you, there, coming up from the metro, bringing the morning paper and a warm baguette—I tuck the poem under my arm the same. I love you, and yet, you are still inside the poem, like the pit inside the cherry.



The Clichy workmen are awake. All great things packed into a black valise—it belongs to me—the cafés, the street markets, lighting a match on the sole of a shoe. A woman drinks red wine in a window of rue Cardinal Lemoine, asking always for the time, for cigarettes. She wears a black dress, like every woman in dozens of rooms, smoking and watching. The atrocity of the streets and back to the bottle to find that same green light.

A hungry look, a kiss in place of firmness. Wild, bold eye. Headache, fever. We find the same glory as the sons of Napoleon's soldiers, dying and waking up inside the morality of dreams.



Paris, prepared before your arrival—an opium smoker preparing his pipe. The same street was waiting since you were born, spending all this time crawling to it, building your vocabulary to it.



In spite of business, I am watching the whole mass of a woman slumped in a small pink chair at the café across the street, absorbed in purple shade. This morning, she found her husband and a woman locked together in the courtyard's green alcove. And somehow she is at the same café with little blue shadows on the sides of her mouth. She is thinking what a stream of marital bliss and the strange creeping across the courtyard, toppling by the trellis.

Everything getting reduced now to one man and one woman and one kind of loathing.

The no color of regions not contained in the book—James Joyce is writing down the street, making love with Ulysses, crying out, yes, horses come in many colors among them black and turquoise and bottle green, yes, a woman sitting on the toilet or maybe a man sitting on the toilet and the whole moment like a groin, yes, all is intermittent depending upon the hour, yes, a pupil is black or tortured syntax birthed out the typewriter is black or all the new rules of evolution are black, yes, staying in this room until it all comes out, yes!

Across the street, Ernest and Hadley Hemingway are the result of a heroic wasteland. He once held dueling pistols and a sack of mail and a grey breast and a brown paper bag which contained only the remnants of french fries and now a pigeon crawls in and Ernest traps him, twists his neck, makes an excellent soup. He grabs sex and no one really knows or cares if this is true to his body. He doesn't mind that the sky is always greenish and that Joyce stole his good typewriter. All men are trying to write the same account of a woman's body, he reasons.

The melody of a train, the racket of wine glasses—as though the train were a pencil and the wine glasses were broken things. Hadley yelling, leaving the windows open, letting in pigeons and red petals from Joyce's window box and unhappiness and the calling out of lovers getting home—she lets this all in the apartment. She is leaving him. He throws a bottle of whiskey out the kitchen window and all the citizens toss their hats in the air. He is one of them! They are running into the streets or to the window, all the writers in Paris.

Building a bridge inside the apartment—Hadley doesn't know how important he is. The wrong kind of apartment ruins a marriage, the kind whose walls have only been painted once, the same white. A rope ladder descends from nowhere and Joyce climbs in beautifully—he is more famous in Paris. A woman sloshes red wine in the café near the market on rue Mouffetard so that we all know none of this is stage machinery, that we are formed of too many parts to make just one book.

The foliage unfolds like sheaths of paper. I, too, am a writer with visitors at all hours. Writing next to a white window—there is nakedness in this, a formal greeting, a large man, and a old poem, hoisted up on the same scaffolding.



The Australian cartographer is leading us to the Champs Élysées and stealing doughnut peaches. She and everyone else talk about David Lynch and David Foster Wallace and suicide, except for me. I am always talking about only one thing and one way of seeing. There are stripes of white quartz in the street, that is all I mean—there are stripes of white quartz, I saw them.



We are terrified of the city. Our terror is half what is already inside us.



Is it a cherry or is it organ meat?

Is it pollen or is it semen?

Is it a cherry blossom or is it my mouth?

Is it the poem or the dream of the poem?



I remember New Hampshire. I remember we stopped on highway medians for milkweed and monarch butterflies. The things I was good at, I did. I raised butterflies.

In Paris, which is not home, I do the things I am afraid of. I ask strangers where the best cigar shop is in the Latin Quarter. I write about my father. I buy a fish with the skeleton still there, I cook it with the skeleton still there, I eat it with caper berries and leave the skeleton on my plate.



It is not about the yellow tulips in her garden, but the length of the man in her bed.



Hemingway says you can't write a whole market into the book. You can choose one perfect thing to stand in for the market, such as a white chicken with its head cut off.

I am cataloguing pigeons: white with black blotch circling eye, white throated and awful pink toes, all black with tiny revolving yellow eye, red beaked mouthing a cherry stem.



You see, we are buying whitefish on rue Mouffetard. You see, I am not paying attention to the calendar, but roaming in any direction. The meaning of the day is buying whitefish, asking also for camembert *fort* and heirloom tomatoes *violet et vert*. Roaming, that we might pay attention to our wounds. Buying whitefish, that we might rediscover the present.

You see, the pulse quiets, just walking and winding corners. This is not New York. We are not walking as if to the slaughter. I might turn here, passing no one. I might turn here, walking toward the fishmonger, away from the calendar's clamor and into the current.



It's like a trick, but I still want to write it. I have no editor, but I still want to write. I have no husband, but I still want to write. I want to write until the poem is a man and we are drinking coffee in the café at Place Contrescarpe, making love in the sick green courtyard.



A poem is a place for people afraid of becoming lost. Paris is peopled by poems.



Anaïs Nin painted each room at Louveciennes a different color, making purpose out of mood. One room, red—lust, cherries, deep woman. Green—lonely, dinner, brimming with sleep. Peach—morning, champagne, loving innocently. The fourth, gray—gray as the typewriter, meant for the secrets of letters, for hiding from husband behind language.

And the garden, the monstrous garden, for all colors—sex, diary, singing out and cursing his body—hooked by him, crawling out but coming back for another insatiable morning. The garden again, with its wonderful claws.



You are sitting down, smoking; you think you are sitting in your pipe, and it's you that your pipe is smoking; it's you that you are breathing out in the form of blue tinged clouds.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE



And how undone am I—against the empty of talk, I write.

French does not fail and may be beautiful, but a red skirt is beautiful and olives are beautiful and all the churches in everywhere are beautiful.

I have not forgotten the full space of me between his thighs—

The pit of a nectarine—the pulpy carmine of a rabbit heart.

When I lecture you with my body, it is acceptance of death. I am not dead but in the process of dying. Finding a piece of ash is significant.

And how the body of the bottle is like my body—I empty its full hips. We have eaten the meat and the fruit. Underneath, the cloth of forgetting—



Paris is an optical illusion. No one comes to Paris prepared to die. No one comes to the poem prepared for the ending.



I might bring you breakfast on a black lacquered tray, of pitted cherries, of mint tea, of quail eggs.

Breakfast is a conclusion. We spent—we spent the night—we spent the night outside the bed, outside the dream of bed—we, rocking the air. It was three hours into morning and we sent the bed across the room. We slept on the floor in front of the big wall of mirror. Waking, we are cocooned in white Egyptian cotton. I mistake the mirror for a window.



In the morning, the same game of waiting for an invisible man to get out of the shower, of making a book. Important to make eye contact when clinking glasses, yes, but how a whole night might be spent in bed facing his back.

Home, the absolute kitchen—him breaking white dishes, leaving for Les Halles. All the while, red petals on the unbearable terrace.



Coming in waves—I want more, I want to be taught the uses of flexibility, I want to walk naked into the cross-shaped pond at Versailles, I want to cover you in cherries, I am hidden under my clothes, I am less like my mother who once made love in a car full of lilacs, I want to leave the bed, I am enclaving myself in the yellow of the west set sun, I am lolling purple olives with my tongue, I am showing you the positions I am good at, I don't have to be taught to finish a man, I buy violets for the kitchen, I burn beeswax candles in three wine bottles, I am doing the favorite job of a woman which is always done and will keep being done, I am writing you a letter, I am writing a poem without you in it, I am thinking of entering the mosque for a cup of tea, I am having you in the tub, I am taking hours to release, I am off the map, I make the poem and tongue its excellent magic trick.



How to make a Kir Royale:

1. Begin with a dream in French. In this dream, a twenty-foot woman swathed in black, beating her fists on the throne. We are in an arena built of orange clay, and she is built of grave-black, pit-black, pulling each shadow into her mouth. She is speaking stony, hands crashing. From the center of the arena, a peal of apology—the prince is bellowing at the her, his apricot skin draped in blue cloth. He is raising up the bulk of a bull's head, monster eyeballs bloody, hanging out thready red. He is offering his best possession, and she is still going to kill him. My own head hooded black—I witnessed, so I too must die.

2. Crème de cassis from Burgundy, bottled like blood, blotting out the bottom of the glass. The room of people watching you has nightmares about this color, and only you are still looking into the glass, which has no bottom now.

3. Instead of a cannon, you might use a champagne bottle, deceiving a room of people by exclaiming Cover Your Eyes! Fill the rest of the glass, frothing. It is critical the orchestra plays something which lightens the narrative.

4. The fluted glass is swinging her hand. She is reading a poem and we all know it is about sex with a man in the audience. The glass is stained pathetic, watery pink. Clean it well and fall asleep in another room, jacketed in shadow.



Another beautiful red mouth. Another party in a thousand rooms. In some sense, women break the glass keeping them from men. We are all as young as what hides under our clothes, stirring cherries into our drinks and finding always a new way back to the apartment.

We are beyond rescue, pressing our faces to the moon, saying, why not a whole book in the gutter!

I should have written what I saw. Black velvet dress, pearl earrings, I am unspeakable with my hand down the banister. Bringing the public into my bed and out again, the wild noise of the elevator.

Toasting to his good health and mine—the whole mineral happiness of the apartment—throwing opening the windows, telling all them down on the rue to have sex! Look at each other through the watery evening! Pool inside her bright body! Bite the plum! Forget the furniture! Sit on the floor and read each other only bad writing!



Another dinner party on the floor. Like this, I say, Baudelaire witnesses them all take opium—how they eat an early dinner, checking their pocket watches, falling onto each other in their great velvet suits. He watches them, sits on a red cushion, thinking only of the two compartments—the Paris we see and the one we write.



The window, the window—make an event of looking! To the window and its four great panels of seeing. Out there, behind the apartment, Les Arènes de Lutèce—

There is something in the arena with its big, wet mouth. The rainwater puddling pushes against and everywhere the coming growl. The scene melts until one man is all and there is yellow in the white of his eyes. His mouth screwing up to the purples and grays of his nose, water in an open jaw—the face of a man pushing into a woman and his hand is on her hip flat, and he is crying and pouring into her. The sky pours, colors pooling around.

Rain is the reverberation of a thousand tiny images falling and collecting inside the poem.



Not Neruda's cherry trees anymore, but Sakaguchi's, terrible and lovely. No sound comes from any of the four directions crushed under the white blossoms, just empty white whistling. I am taking another into the forest and we are disappearing together under the petals, or maybe we were only ever in this place.

Paris grows branches for hands—no one gets buried in Paris anymore. They only live and live, a pile of big bones blackened in the same apartments with new inhabitants. Where is Joyce? He is knocking on the other side of the white walls. His semen is still in the carpet. He hears every word of ours, but the book is already written and so we don't matter.

I am shutting my legs, but cherry blossoms still grow up between—

I am switching places with my desire, caught under the drift. I am in love with the poem, with the man in the poem, who is not you, who is making me dinner in the apartment. I am in love with the poem, licking it clean. I am handing out pamphlets I printed on the Vandercook.

I have shut my thighs and still the terrible sap.

A month goes by and I continue to hate scotch, the smell of scotch, the gold paralysis of scotch. Scotch says to Joyce, you will never be buried. Scotch is a fence keeping him out.

Joyce is ready in the oven. We arrive in the kitchen, and hear his echo, black and clanging.

I do not love you, or else I have always loved you, saving you from the awful corpse the adjective modifies. When will you learn? Nothing is buried in Paris, but sprawls naked in bed with us.

I am closing my legs, but still it all comes up.

I am a poet, not a woman. I am a poet, not the maker of dinner. Joyce prays in the oven, out of ideas for the novel, so we write a poem together: the apartment, covered in petals, is restless.



Instead of writing letters, we stop having sex. Tell me, please, what you are looking for, lumbering around the apartment which is also the poem. Today, there is no protection, no parade, but we are in the metro and the train won't take us where we want to go.

I teach men to cook beautifully. I teach them pulsing in their thighs. I teach them to make the bed and run screaming from the apartment.



We will always be going away from people we love, amassing a great desire. The letters record this, include leaving and waiting in the relationship. A telegram or a post-it note, it is all the same device. I want to love him, but I also want a mad frenzy of body. I want to swallow the pit, but then I may house a cherry tree. Neruda's cherry blossoms always finding me, coming out at me. Does he want her to blossom or does he want to be on her, blossoming?

The poem is always flowering and often with the ugliest leaves around it. One way out is to write, another is to strip naked and be in love.

To love all of the men I've known at once—not them but the awful need of sex, living, closeness. Coming, dragging sound out my throat, spilling to the floor. Living dreadfully for the bed, closed lids, no empty part of the room. Shouting again, the whole apartment building in a rage—Paris shaking with terrible noise, the elevator trembling in its shaft, and even she in the painting is quaking at her hinges.



I am sick now, and no one will come to me on the second floor. I will not remain alone, and so persuade my horrible knees to the streets. I am drunk or dreaming, and suddenly, stoops are clawing out to me. Every balcony is a beast and its black wrought iron back arches up the building. Every window looking into some other life is a big gray nothing.



The poem is a conversation and everyone is speaking at the same time about the woman's body and the body of the poem.



A walk to the market is a chance to lose loneliness. Palm pink, palm reaching, she is selecting salmon and sour cherries. In public, like she is naked and brimming, resounding in the bowl of a turtle shell. Her seabone pink hands. She washes each morning in the pen tip, sinking into the white paper and him, giving her whitest eyes.

A mirror makes a copy of her minus the secret. In blooming, in forgetting all the given names for things—the most beautiful slow pinkness sealing the sky's edge. A mirror beams out the almost replica underneath.

When he presses her, the whole vast strain shudders—even just the hand, a mirror of the whole body's wants. The white joy, leaning in and making a mountain. Across the swell, a man might forget his promise—making a bed out of a person, confusing time with sanity.

They are always floating in the air of their own making.

A child might lose her own want in a sky, so thick with black—mostly, they do not know why but push on, always opening. If they fear, it is not because they do not know the sky, but because it shocks the body into breathing.

In the morning, a proposition.

In the morning, a mirror of the market in her eyes. He loves the market more than before, because she has seen it and loves it. To transmit and to love—it is always just one man and one woman—the whole city is made out of their desire.