

W e l l s

R a c h e l B l a u D u P l e s s i s

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It seems to me that these poems are immensely strengthening:
a companionship among us.

--George Oppen

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Undertow

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U n d e r t o w

Undertow

That I am rigid dead in a sheet
awake
the night melting my body melting
my head rock stark
and hoarding iron

That you have touched my nipple and
I am ripped away with grief

nothing can enter an empty gulf

Sleek earth, rust brown, a shining
I am driving past this
silent
thru the fog of asking
again and again
what I am severed from.

The undertow
that happens
frozen time happens
within
rigid
force it pulls me down dead set.
Against.
Battlefield.
My staring helmeted face
stock still
and desolation

snapped off trees
infertile mud
the uprooted.
My place.
I am the grief.

The undertow
sucks me down
my breath rock hard
under the quick water.

Sleep pleasure the open voice these it cannot bear
these
powerful a tide running out
these these
that happen

tonight
that cannot happen,
locked
close
the earth
rich
fissure.

Pebble dirt
bare road
cannot move
in bed that place cannot
in my breasts it is finished

Comes
the undertow

not not not
myself
is it myself?

Elegies

In the green spring storm
buds of the trees
pulled to the ground
lie still
full of fluid.

We breathe each other in.
I think of a dead man.

On whose deaths do we live?
On whose deaths do we survive?

Young girls who fell into open wells
in open fields
Young rivers burnt off
turned from their courses
The stiff woman in her bed

You were not ready.

Seeds

Unflowering flowers
in your tender pocket
lie buried under the road

Stephen

Portrait of a Man

With a wound
cut like the slash on an unbaked loaf
opening under the swift knife.
To let the bread widen—
yeast eating through flour
and breathing out!
I sing
a simple wound of open flesh.

First taste the wheat
then touch with your tongue
the savor of salt grounded under it.
The drop atip a cock.
A lick of blood in a red cunt.
Swamped air in the throat
swallows down
already muted
bitterness:
the nourishment
complex, like prophecy
come true in another sense.
You will eat your bread
with your salt.

I see a man in his chosen woods
forming unleavened bread.
I see a man
immersed to his neck
in a pungent swamp.
Even when he put aside yeast
and tried to live without salt
still—these paths into the self:
perhaps they lead nowhere?
in a circle? he came through the woods
to a deep cut.

Is it a wound or is it a birth?
White robed, masked,
he cries out.
He stands dissecting himself.
He lies in front of himself bound to the table.

Entry: Today

Today that red bird's pip taps a flurry of knocks
against the bread I left.

Today is grey and green and gaunt; is air under eclipse,
the brown wind and the shiver.

Today I held Lynn's baby, nine days old. The cord blackens.
The button pushed inward, attaching himself to himself.

Days in one day, roads that criss-cross roads.
The roaring ocean stood up like a wall.
Where wet leaves, hours, adhere, the window pales.

Three dimensional days have the shape of rooms
slowly clogged up;
empty flat nights, there's nothing to do but wait
and dawn finally comes.
Grey songs from grey beaks.

I saw my flesh-lost fetus that day,
clear, unreal blue, a collapsed globe.
Cord snapped off, a thinnest twine.
The unborn eye slits in the skull deep sockets were
black lines
for two dates crossed off on the calendar.

Leaving One Place for Another

These furnished places
the sky a white screen
the powerful image
and accident.

What was it what part
of the body why talk Silence
surrounds these instincts

I leaned out of the window.
In the back of my mind you
with your cigarette
hunched over it
and others arrested like that,
the same river in six cities.

Voice

my
silence years long
silence.

Talking to you
you're taking
both halves
of this
conversation.

Who are you
talking to?
your voice

where does it come from
the full blown
resonance

Where do they come
from? the words

uninterruptible

machinery

My father
what am I saying?

“We men we are lost”

They lock around our necks,
drowning.

Their fascinating cries
“Save us” “Save us”

To turn away
from the roiled water
split now
no longer
whole never again
perfect like a daughter—

The cracked throat
sounding
itself

my voice the
voice that no longer
fears (but does)
(fear) the necessity
to speak.

Memory

P.S. In cleaning came across some diaries esp. of Minnesota trip an Arkansas. Not full ones for every day but what I did jot down (and that's really all it was) seemed to have nothing except the fact that everyone always had colds. I was always running-in re: Mother (mine)—and I don't even remember too much of that (!) and once in a while a "bright" remark of your & Judy. It is mostly of things I have no recollection happening.

Letter, October 1976.

My mother stands on the lawn
saying "I have wasted my life"
but never saying that again.

A green lawn, a little hill
she turned to me;
what ash-tongued
comforting that then tries no
o no you haven't
(wasted)?

Cleaning "for Thrift," laughing
do you want this,
do you remember
this dress? *I don't even remember.*
I am living in the dumbness
of time
over.
No recollection
little words o
no o
no.

She is wasting a bone-
handled knife. *Things.*
I have no recollection happening.
A rug I hated and then loved,
a 30s rug.
We are standing on a little green hill.
The house grows darker.
I am
sealed up in time
muttering, no
no not wasted.

The ink is black.
The paper burning.
Everywhere illegible tissue-thin
ashes no, no *not full ones*
no recollection
swirl in the wavy roar of heat
like pieces of a one-letter alphabet.

The house grows darker. My first poem
was "Memory." I was climbing
a hill, stepping forward,
watching the fiery moments
born as I was walking.

Every day
seemed to have nothing
wasted "My life is wasted"
house hill *no recollection*
grow darker.
A woman
choosing the choices
that were
and that's really all it was
moment by moment
nothing except the fact
that everyone always
had chosen;
as, to be born.

In my bed I dream of the murderous mother.
In bed dead father dark as a puppet.
Under the scummy pool she holds her black-haired daughters.

Two precious pearls, these parents.

Who has love enough to meet them
At the ever-increasing crossroads?

A Poem of Myself

Sometimes I cannot move at all and will not either

I imagine myself looking over a group of hills somewhere else, away.
In Italy.

The trees begin swaying as I watch them
Turning inward and outward onto myself.

No. I am sitting on a terrace and no one is bothering me.

Standing in entrances. About to come in.
My shoulders are hunched forward to hide my breasts.
When am I going to come into the room?

Come in, come in, I say to all the fragments

Shell-Round Space

Mirror Poem

Your thick metallic menstrual aroma
Your changes

My desire to enter this knowledge of your changes.
The symbol of fountains.

Stains on the bed are sienna pink.
I embrace the shell-round space you arise from.

I have swum through fish lakes and fish oceans
being nibbled by mouths bubbling O's of air

I have climbed calendars like mountains

Walked down many a white road.

I dream of women.

I touch them, take their hands as they come towards me.
One is paler than in life; one has hennaed her hair.
I take their hands and ask
how is it in your life, how is your life.
One slides away from me as she has always done;
We cannot make contact, yet we have created each other.

We touch our finger tips as equals across a lengthening space.

Accept women; accept the love of women; accept loving women.
There I saw her at her window
early morning, white nightgown
when I looked out of my window
early morning, white nightgown.

Another morning looks out of the morning.
We could kiss each other. It would be no surprise.

With Mary

My woman, she seemed to burn
she waited long
her skin grew dry
like a soft, pink herb.

Open the window!
Sing from the window
that song, that glass bridge over earth
touches birds, touches the tips of trees.

We are united;
we make each other pregnant.

From the bridge we see into the faces
deep with themselves in conversation.
Not yet, they say.
No.

We throw them our flowers, swift as petals.
Drink in, embrace;
our rain is falling.
We shall know who we are.

And who those downcast faces are
we know.
They are ourselves also
but refusing

A LITTLE BREATH

a bird

she sits

on the edge

of the bathtub

and watches

the sky open

the silence

where she breathes in and out.

Painting

Bird among fruit, jewels and vines

The woman holds the bird cupped in her hand
The bird pecks at her nipple

peck
peck

takes the nipple in a willing beak.

From the breast comes one drop clear
like a tear
and one drop white
the milk, or pearl

and then silence
that's all

The little wizened eye
winked closed
the nipple old as a mountain

Flower

remembering O'Keefe

1.

Knife sheath broken
white knife emerging.

2.

Hard flower.
The rock of the rock.

3.

Line of unlimited riven pressure,
which is the dark eye in the center
which is the bone juncture of the center
which is upthrust in the swirling center
which is life upon crows.

Pomegranate

remembering Sappho

Torn open—

that parchment
of negative spaces
'no honey
nor the bee'

empty globes
where seeds
fell
from

fragment upon fragment.

The honey-combed thirst
speaks deep from the throat

a riddle
so little
will quench,

say
six seeds

a taste of the mother.

These are pebbles
that plant
down the well
and to each stone
the fruit of water clings.

The whole enseeded
fissure
opens wide-eyed
over her angelic body.

She knows that to speak
she must swallow herself.

Psyche

Train journey

and

journey by water.

Bread crumbled

We attend to each other
like birds

and eat

from one another's hands.

Lady
walk through that door again

in a pink shawl

your V-shaped smile.

We are like deer.

It was difficult to get
to the train door

and over the water

: :

A living statue of the goddess of mercy
his white road,
as he saw her:
her eyes, her hands
folded down to the center.

: :

Now
silent voyage on
dry tracks

Your hands to my eyes
cover over
maps

Trains try to burrow under the sand
just at the edge of ocean
and hit against a flooded wall.

: :

His hands are glass
and break when they touch her.

But he can see through his hands
to a clear pool of water
to the nude lying desired
drowned
underneath.

Her eyes are walled in like castles.

The side of her breast
falling forward onto his mouth
draws blood like a knife.

: :

The man
shipwrecked
in the blood

The woman
rising
from the foam

They weep
in lily
and rose

“my white road”
“my red flower”

: :

A naked man
stands by an open body of water.

He can go on no further.

He is an island. The water surrounds him,
all the grass has whitened around him.

His penis is a long bone, like the spine
of an animal whose flesh was picked clean.

: :

She covers herself with a cloth.
Names of the stations
a foreign alphabet
chattering.

The tracks of underground lights,
the necklace taken off, set aside.

She holds tight.

The red train rushes through.

: :

Travel by train, the trees are money.
Travel by car, the roads are girlish.
Travel by foot.

: :

Deep
under
the bottom of the ocean
opens a footpath.

In the room
of the body
air circulates
rising like bread
from two green trees
whose branches quietly brush.

: :

Birth is the secret word for bread.
Book is the secret word for boat.
Railway is the secret word for railway.

: :

The rounded bodies flood with air
on the earthen threshold.

Torsos well up, subside.
The door is open.

: :

The woman comes thru my door
enters my room
takes my breasts in her hands
kisses my mouth softly.

How difficult it is to make this journey!

I kiss her eyes
I touch her arms
I hold her legs, a railing.

I use the railing to pull myself along the roadway.

: :

'She stands on the roots of a tree.
As she stands, the roots sink deeper and deeper.
Soon she has gone in up to her neck.
Then the full moon rises in the east.'

: :

And
the man has breasts.

Beautiful breasts,
rings,
silver bracelets, and
hard breasts.

Quiet eyes stroke them.

: :

The man enters the dawn and the moon
of the same day.

Shadowy
the rising sun
at dawn.

Bright
the moon holds up
the other side.

He is flooded with two sets of wings;
Flap? Flap?

: :

He was pregnant. Gave birth to twins.
Entered the sweet water
To help them get out.

: :

She had a phallus.
Lace for her foreskin:
that feminine touch.

: :

A limb ripens outside the window
sealed hands unfurling slowly

which mirror each other,
flood-rush river, scud-swift sky.

I fall into my hands
rock
fold like a loaf.

I fall into the touch of my own
working palms,
knead,
loaf, invite my soul.
One brown voice rises like a bud tip.

I carry her in my arms, my swaddled soul.
We stumble into every hole of earth.

W e l l s

Breasts

A laughing man's voice
coils
around and ropes me.

Walking down the street,
netted by calls,
walking thru the words
thrown on my path.
I stumble. I walk
among the knife-sharp voices
cutting their mark.

In one man's eye a hand
severed at the wrist.
His other eye winks shut.
One man's head incises
vulva
the hieroglyphic slits
or urinal drawings.
Another swings a briefcase
stuffed with women's legs
cut off.
And a man
lifts up
a woman's tongue
between his thumb and finger.
From hand to hand
they pass a woman's breast,
finish,
and toss it down the gutter.

Nessie

for Woolf

She was a great
fury a great furry sleek black otter
seal with a snaky decor. Long writhing writing
along her coiling.

People paralyzed on their verandas,
“It is she! “She! not a snake a giant
black sleek never seen before she had shown only
a small part
before.

Maddened, longing, crying, with open doggy mouth
she threw herself again and again against the window
her wrinkled working face

will she get in? she slid into the room no one knew what.
They had never recognized never wanted to?
they were wondering.

Oil

bei Dickinson

The oil that rises every month
as oracle of moon
slides sleekly from the strata wells—
a panther in the bush—

or where there was the hush that comes
just when the power moves
beyond the stands where we are happy,
rooted as we are—

when solid Silence drops away
and from a hole beyond
the darkest Gush
will geyser up
as brilliant as the sun.

Just the universe again
that voices from the Void—
Abyss is not an absence
though presence be destroyed.

Var. for 1.13 and last stanza

as brilliant as the sun—

and covers sun, though sun is bright,
so force is faced obscure—
a knowing darkly in the Rush
that light can not answer.

Medusa

I.

Flat-faced cave-space
splay eye see
fat mulch intertwy
canna say

bare as a veld a Welt
crosst tongue speak it
too out too dumb
pock muck.

To which
he held the meanings up
a silver quick shield slick
shimmer

showing which
is object, which subject,
the discourse
faceting her.

She is the thing he
flickers with his light.
She sees it
thru his eyes

her days thru his rays
her face thru his orbs
her phase thru his eye-
balls.

Her he can and as he can
he ken and names the
knowing;
breaks her
in
to being ridden,
over the half-spoken,
over the forgotten.

2.

Ever who
is seed
astride me
ken can word ran
sharp honed

over my mutter-
ring
unwitting.

Everywhere
I see
inside me
Man poised

on my eye
a knife
ceaselessly
on a whetstone.

3.

White slice thru tree
thru earth, sky

forcing the branch
ripping the tree.

It is like this:

Dirt
in my brain

over an over
dirt in my brain.

4.

A carve of pain a howling mouth

It is

dark

the emptied self

Striking my head on the rock my mother

5.

Stole
they
eye of my mother,
stole they teeth,
mother.

Broke the moon box
where she keep
the deep socket
of the child set solid.

Whole bright
tooth bone
Round gnawing
eye Stone.

Stole
they
eye of my mother,
stole they teeth,
mother.

Eye-tooth
tooth-eye
cavern slug
hair-face

she weave a woven
to webble the wobble words.
A-
gnomy
hey nonny nonny.

But stole
the shuttle eye
from my mutter
her loopy threads
tho he has wise

stole the teeth out
of my mutter
her pearly seeds
tho he has knives.

6.

What is this thing
this ancient middenstead?
All stark.
It is a stone.
Its lips are stone.
Its eyes are mica mirrors.

It stands; states
I am the crossroad
stone.

7.

What grow
grows roots out.
What grow roots
crown down web
listen root.

What grow
know spout out.
What grow vine
writhe listen long
voice sprout.

What grow
wide hair weed.
What grow slimy
lithe hum tide
loosy grewn hair.

O voice seed.
Listen root.
Spring sprout.
Head web.

From the eye jet
from the tooth debt
rock and reck
rock and reckon.

8.

Tunnel black mouth
screams in the open
Propulsive echo-long
howl from my own tunnel
Resounding in the round tunnel
I have unburied.
I wrench the root cord.

With every thick stone split
a knotty pulp
root-rattle, stem-snattle
corona open(r)ing
in the cave-heavy corridor.
Roots up! Rouse up!
It shoots out from inside.

Ten hundred heads blood-rich from mine
my lava head, my rocky mine.
The sprout the burst the leap
of sight
the spurt the spoke the ken
of voice

in sight, my netted reach
in voice, my knotted speech.

1974-78

Eurydice

I.

Since the narcissus bud,
eye of a bird,
of a girl,
almond shaped eye,

when not yet open,
smells more of its
rich flower
than
when it has opened,

she desires never to be opened.

a hidden bird mistaken
for a leaf on a young tree.

2.

She will lie naked
where sea touches sand;
her own body
the border; the edge
dividing ocean and land
against itself; but of one body.

And tides come over her.
Then she will be turned
into a smooth stone
salt white as an egg,
shiny as an eye.

She will turn
over and over on herself,
body balancing ocean and land,
throwing the stone

down

a deeper and deeper well.

3.

Back arched like a bow
lips like arrows stinging.

And then you wet me with your tongue.

This is my fragrance.
You say
honey tastes sour
after.

You sing to me
that I am a fresh pool.

4.

Where is the bird?
fallen from flying

Where is the arrow?
hard in the wound

Where is the stone?

Songs are his,
melody like a great linked chain.
Touch is his,
outlining the edge of my dance.

I cannot find my center
I cannot find my path.
Now he can make me open, shut and open

Now I have lost myself.

5.

Silent I sit in the garden
Silent I go forth

Flower or meadow
where is there meaning

I pass through the meadow

6.

Her deepest desire was to pierce herself.

the snake her head

the snake her hair

the snake her arm

the snake her ribs

the snake her foot

into crevices between rock faces

under surfaces

under flowers

under earth.

7.

I went into the fissure.
The dark rock opened.
I faced away from the shining point
of earth-green light.

This is stone
opening,
the uneven, moist, hard surface,
rock-littered path,
jagged,
catching myself.

Hard cave
I have entered.

This is stone
deeper
than I ever was.

8.

I see rocks made by the slow dripping of water
I see an underground pool, thick as a black mirror
I see a spring at the source.

9.

He has entered the dark
behind me

He wants to bring me back to the light

He wants to retrace the steps of my journey.

No.

I am turning.

I am going deeper
into the living cave.

10.

In the cave
I am a rope held out to myself
silver and gleaming in the labyrinth.
I know the center of the cave.

In the cave
I am a vein of silver in the rock.

In the cave
I am an ancient plant
putting forth thin white root threads.
I can make the rock crumble into rich earth.

In the cave
I am matted, woven roots.

II.

She will take shape and sprout
a soft light far from the surface
pushing outward, of her own power
stalk, ladder of climbing cells
root, filling the corridors of rock
flower, breaking the earth, fragrant, opening

seeds of Eurydice

She will brood and be born
girl of her own mother
mother of the labyrinth
daughter
pushing the child herself outward
great head, the cave large inside it
great limbs of a giant woman
great cunt, fragrant, opening

seeds of Eurydice

1973-74

Falling Into Earth

Pastoral and Gigue

Peace gentle wood bird
kinwing loose in the natter

now will you
wet with dew and rumpled

plummet, hymeneal,
to the emptiness of the threshold.

Plumy as the ticklish
peaceful as the tickled

two cold feet step flat
into the night grass

at that bare and
itchy place that dance

down the patchy dirt path
beneath the road beneath the grass.

Earth in your face
for all black sky is earth

oily, wading into emptiness
the roadway under roadway

earth covering bird
of milk eggs plump, stars

in the dance
that leaping
seed and dead of night, so *da capo al fine*

fine that dance
that falling into earth.

Voyaging

for George Oppen

Boatman

bearing us over the water
to the island

the dead
cannot be forgotten.

But where we are
a little space is clear,

wet circle on the desk,
the white circle of air,
we must breathe

the blind
white voyage.

Remember the steadying beat
over the bay?

A ladder rises up from the rock shoreline.
Lithe, the boy climbs down
to the surface of waters lapping

His feet balance on that clean boat briefly

he takes
heavy baskets tucked with prim white cloths

Springs back
pushes the boat away with all his force.

And so we eat and read and watch
our necessity.
Sit in the sunny doorway.

And again fog hides the water
dwelling here.

This white
I resist it hurt my eyes
fear

the mist in our faces, our hair
nourishing us with breath
hardly
comprehensible.

Now the fog is lifting
revealing the day.
The little boat we sail
has come into view

It is not
too close, pressing us

nor is it very far away,

O
boat—

thin hand
O sweet quick silver

charged
thru the round magnet of water

flinches
when the knowledge strikes
pulls up from its wake

Impossible

that it should be

this

power
white wind shapes our faces
heavy sighting earth-line

voyaging here the horizon there.

"Whirr Shrill Crickets"

Whirr shrill crickets
cicadas

 Silvery
field disc bright that seeds itself
 ;
 :
 :
everyday bud.

Put your nose into the flower, you
are shivering
some soft bird wood

voice

hidden in the teeming answering
from no one point.

And bottomless the field of night.

Because
awakened stones are with us
thirsty
in the light of stars.

Black and white
black and white
wave after wave the ocean hisses black
field white field a place not
a place but crossings, distances
into

To take
 and hold
one water bright stone

red pink green

names

The small waves' names the grass-
wheat bud thin molecules
flesh into the
light

What will protect us from pleasure?

To breathe the air rushing us forward

Open night sky nothing
stands between the self and its
disappearance

It is already a star