

Something Like Attribution

According to women, when to use knives

Women got to know when to use knives, when to slip metal
through their common-law men, metal words will do, but knives
work best sometimes when he come home too late, too wet,
those beggar eyes, yes, slippery lips, he speaking without words
clutching house keys, glass bottle against thigh and groin,
she in her tee-shirt, common and cold, and clutching at -- what?

what newspapers leave out.

What I got? Always women want to know, words clicking down throats,
snapped off by sore molars, 3 a.m. cigarettes, cigars if he left them.
If he did, when he come home, he call her baby -- thief -- bitch --
close them wolf eyes, men always do; didn't he get worlds,
life with a girl who smile when she told, when she ain't,
she stay with him when bud's got him against walls and the law
What I got but a man? She knows. Left without words
and his words without love and too late but that's

what newspapers leave out.

Woman in kitchen, man is dead.
Morning headlines a day or two, three later.
The official report, they say they got, and her mug
shot: Wide, dog eyes, cigarette lips.
Woman of women who know what they got, words
refuse to forget: On slippery nights they cure what common cold.

what newspapers leave out.

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The Bagley Road Goat

Horace Gowan for years
lived near the crook
or bend, some called it,
in Bagley Road.
The Bend in Bagley Road:
where Gowan kept a goat
and one one-eyed llama.

But the goat –
her pewter penny eyes,
knotted legs,
lovely mews bawling out
across the loam and dirt and ponds,
soft tongue on octogenarian knuckles
– the goat Gowan loved.

One October morning
frost or cool ghosts bent Gowan's knees
like Bagley Road.
The old, beaky man was slow to rise.
He fingered hard snot around raw nostrils,
slurped cold medicine,
and stopped cold at this:

Goat Marigold whinnying
like a mare. She cried from the
back Bagley loblollies as
Gowan prayed for a sore leg
or deep hunger, (the greedy goat!),
running through his rolling yard.

But Horace, wise and old, knew prayers often
went awry, crooked as his fingers
or bent lanes where old men lived.

That night Gowan dreamed:
rough tongues, bloody throats, dead goats
and the neighbor's pit-bull
barking up the bend in Bagley Road.

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Serious Sestina

I never used words like true and love
in the same sentence or accurate way.
On scalding mornings or steeped noons
or after drinks at some bar, I'd sway
to the songs in my head; making room
for lies and blinking eyes to some boy

or man I knew I should need. But boy
I didn't know a damn thing about loving
with fingers and teeth and world-filled rooms.
How can you learn about cotton sheets? The way
they become some kind of cool skin, the sway-
backed girl I've always been in the afternoon

changes to a thing straighter. I am nooning
with you, the spring-summer infinite boy
I sought in spheres of early-hour swaying.
Remember Gaia was strong, loved
only what she could make in her own way.
Didn't need no thing, no man, no bedroom

to be wrapped in cool cotton. Rooms
fill my head when – just like that – it's noon
and my legs are words I never knew; ways
I wouldn't take 'til you, the boy
who gives me a sky wrought with some love
that earth-woman won't ever reach. Sway

with me. Build me into a mountain swaying
with hips and lips cuz I will give you room
to become a God or the First Man I love
or sentences strung out like afternoons
laced with something wilder. My sweet boy,
am I saying it clear? I have weighed

it all out, rolled across the minutes and ways
a woman forgets what she thought she knew; is swayed
by the slightest glance from a man now a boy
in her hands and eyes and spines. The world is roomy
and bigger than skies and oceans in afternoon
mythology when I'm steeped in your love.

Boy, this is it: I got the words and the way
to love you true (I don't blink). With you, I'll sway
through time and noons and dream of cotton bedrooms.

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Casualties of nature

We lost them –
the holding hands
bodies
dancing
long hours in the yard
cool evenings on the porch
quoting from favorite
Western shows
and *La Vie En Rose*.

We lost the smells
of the house
warm and woodsy
Bill hewing some
fencepost
in the shed
Linda smoking a pipe
tapping her foot
along to hidden rhythms
an Edith Piaf record.

And it was –
on the porch
in the house
all over the yards –
La Vie En Rose.
Life's pits and stems
cast against our parents
magic.

The storm came in April.
Hold me close
Linda said.
Hold me fast.

The humming of the earth
opening up.
No one told them —
When heaven sighs,
it yawns with teeth
snapped limbs
stinking debris
looped around
the air.

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We found them
in woods
next to the yard.
Every bone in Bill's
body broken –
this rough-hewn man
holding hands
with the woman
who spoke French
and smoked tobacco
from pipes.

We lost the way
every word
every day
turned into songs.

How easy they became
art. How easy they
made falling in love
with routine
and dancing next to
a wooden, sagging front door.

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