

Contains five poems

### Dante's Lines

If Dante dyed his hair, he would be terrifically delayed on a Saturday morning,

Half an hour bombed to read and write in,

Which would result in one less line.

Maybe two.

If Dante polished his nails, he would dedicate half an hour to this task

Every two-three weeks, or more often if he got tired of the color,

Or in the event.

[Line lost.]

Where the composition of his dress would be all-important.

Each of those primping parties would cost him one or two lines.

Although when you dye your hair or polish your nails, lines may also be gained.

In all likelihood, they would pop up in Dante's brain, effortlessly, quite independently  
from his slow, purposeful actions,

That could be banal like nail polishing.

The polishing causing and not causing a fist ramming lightning antithesis in his gut's  
dark wood.

Okay then.

Never underestimate the nail polishers.

It's so easy to poke fun at them.

[Line lost.]

If Dante divided the tasks of childrearing equally with his wife,

He would have spent a few hours on this every day, which meant fewer lines.

If he hadn't been a powerful Ghelf, on the receiving side of the political divide,

The darling of the Pope and Charles of Valois,  
Would it be possible at all that he took up a dishwashing brush,  
Just to help the wife out now and then, or at least his housekeeper,  
For he surely had one to sort his posh chambers?

And if he hadn't fallen from office would he have brought back his chalice to the  
kitchen,

Not looking at the ruby drops he lost on the way, but the lines, the lines, that left his  
hand trembling, while his head kept busy with all this menial nonsense?

Not being able to do things simultaneously.

Hell, think *and* write?

[Line lost.]

Enter Beatrice, the antidote to Dante's housekeeping fetish, then she became the  
dote.

Beatrice, she wasn't a time-suck: on the few occasions he glimpsed her

She made Dante's poetic zen zip aloft and run gloriously turbo,

Until he crashed down and found himself backtracking over the same painful  
dishwashing brush.

And in the endless fretting and dreams of blessed passion

He likely lost a few more lines that were true and felt,

Oh blessed mother that takes away all my work from me, I will make you famous.

## Mouthings

Your winter coat from Prague. Thermo-patched, dove-cuirass  
lays upon a blond fur corona, buckled forward for a kiss.  
Bubble gum encroaches, making mad with riddle,  
I ask is that cleanser tea, that scent your collar keeps down.  
Beatific with your husky halo, eater of chicken breast,  
you resist so many who would have you,

I can only envy you, sculptor of heart muscles. Lightning.

Geranium lips expectant with curling, the first toppings.  
A pearly rain drips in the overlit, plum parking lot.  
In the boudoir of our seaming hoods it's cool and warm,  
leaning back lucky into hovercraft, spice of spittle,  
you've taken after the baby. I start to dream.  
In this slave market of permeable flesh we control our

import. I like the things that you don't like in you.

You feed your loss, that pain flattened; bubbling like lava,  
I follow your censer. The plated car cracks open  
to stay put until midnight. The organs swell and luxuriate:  
bitter, blooming, I have done this ad nauseam.  
Newbie divorcé, I meet your eye to see  
and there is more. With the drama sketched in,

the routines you do seem so marvelously new.

## If You Know Snow

If you know snow only from a book  
You can be alone, or make a snowperson  
And create anything under your g-loved hands.

If you know snow only from a book  
you can still have white, quiet mornings  
and mysterious, fearful evenings.

In the wide tide of shimmerings  
icicles might trick you  
and propose a beauty overhaul.

Unseen, you can have hundreds of words for it  
your children will have a feeble grasp of,  
unless you make them read.

If you know snow only from a book  
you stand looking out, empty-handed,  
not the easiest words melting against your palate.

You must listen to witnesses of snow  
but beware, don't take over their words --  
The words must be yours.

If you know snow only from a book  
you won't ever use sand to efface it.  
Snow sphinx sounds like a terrible idea.

If you know snow only from a book  
you can make a movie out of it.  
It's up to you.

## Fleshing Out

The decision not fleshed out  
so small it didn't really exist.  
Could I resist its shadow

and feel affection for its parent?  
That I could give it dreams, maybe bad  
ones that I cause?

Sometimes I imagine going shopping  
for gaudy rags at Primark  
and screaming at the top of our lungs.

So small it is crazy that I flushed it,  
it would have been a you now, wan  
youth, but of my growing own.

so undefined, I'm shy to ever  
Look you in the eye —all purpose, not  
One to disturb. What good is a shadow

if not created? A partner only  
at parties? I've looked at your profile  
and thought you resembled me, the shape

I'd been trying to reassemble for  
when I'll grow weaker, so to speak.  
You keep with me, small again—

tiny, so I can hold you in my belly.  
I talk to you, quietly,  
Give you a little pat now and then.

## The City with a Heart

You know the city where you went to on the cheap,  
the city that had positive buzz, said your friends;  
see this cozy cafe, salad with pomegranate;  
the city where once upon a time they bombed its heart  
out, and now you find yourself wandering, looking  
for its heart, maybe it is in that street,  
behind that mall, palace with its cute sign and turrets,  
clearly not the real thing, nor authentic, is it.  
Still, it's cheap here, and warm, because I make that effort.  
The museum showed a maquette showing sacrifice  
after the showdown. It turns out the city never had  
a heroic past, a gush of glory. After the bloody war  
I see orphans recruited by clergy, passing buckets  
with rubble from the spire. I am unable to put myself  
in the place of a stricken bow-tied daughter.  
The monk, once, was smiling, avuncular. He had a past,  
parents, that fed him black bread and potatoes, deloused  
him behind his ears and coiled his earlock, then  
sent him along, a caress on his cold, cold cheek.  
What can he say now to those cute kids? More  
pictures roll past. Cannon holes and beggars in rags.  
Who knows that if I had a daughter I would tell her  
the city we visit, it has a heart still, and gradually  
I would have her discover for herself, herself.