

35 STONES

Leslie Hall Pinder

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1

Water darkens, churns, and boils sun to its surface.

2

You came and got me where I sat, all downturned and quiet. You were both in front and behind. And all the lamps were lit by you. Between us, then, it was as private as a midnight walk, in spite of all the people. The music was pear-shaped, and we were like an elk, like a noble thing.

3

I stood on the street corner, waiting to cross. Your presence was around me in wings, and in that presence the air felt cool and sweet.

4

You had to stop the car because the light was coming through the trees in a certain way, yes bare-boned barren winter trees not barren any more with that light through and through and all around making them known, even such as they were, bare as they were, grand by that visitation of light, my blood grown warm, of course we had to stop of course we did, right there, pull to the side of the road, even if there were all those people, all that commotion, we had to.

5

We fell into the snow, and the mist lifted. My cold winter soul can't you be warmed, can't you, even now. The rattle of my life still echoes in this perfect light that draws and draws; I run away from it like a rat.

6

Warm room after a bath, and body, really quite a perfect body, in the way that you are in it.

“If you can live in the present without too much concern for all the other tenses, then . . .”

“Then there is a commitment for the future?”

“Look at the waves . . .”

7

An intimacy turned world-wise, turned into this person in a crowd whom you watch: away, across, such a formal touch, it seems formal when in the dark, in the day we were everywhere all at once. Inherit the day, rejoice in this new expansion of the particular that all over we live, I live in my breasts. Now, so clothed, so talking, able to put to good use, play out, take on, twist, turn, cavort, dodge—mock.

8

You touch me. I blow onto your neck and you tip your head back so that all your fine neck is exposed, and I breathe closer. A breeze on your skin on your leg and in your hair. You move your head forward again.

9

I have this strange feeling of a connection that is constantly escaping me. These winter trees are clotted with old nests. And *now* who do you think you are? I am thawing out, slowly. I can feel my fingers again, and my toes.

Almost one whole leg is back with me, and half a heart.

10

The moon, now, looks almost full if you come upon it suddenly, not having remarked its course. The moths on the ceiling are attracted to the light, so we close the window that has the thick wooden shutters. And the front door is so intelligent, made of glass for the moon.

We were, finally, to have had lots of time. We were away from the commotion. There were to be days of talking. The band of white skin where your watch was, marked all the hours.

11

From such a long distance I seem to call you, although we are standing back to back, almost at the same place. My voice must go the long way around the world through all the arching zones to find you where you are, behind me. And I can hardly hear you and I can't see you, but I feel your shoulder, your smell consuming my own tight smell.

Women are juggling stones.

12

So wife. So husband. So cuckold. So artist. So what. So go to bed.

There is the long silence of the night and pacing like a ghost who is visiting some habit of living and some habit of remembering how. Learn the small words. Like lie. The tissue of lies so thin, so thin, only I can walk on it having made myself transparent and empty of what has really occurred. I am quite light.

13

You called me this morning. Yes, you had a good time, saw three plays and, sorry, gotta go.

14

A sudden turn of mind or emotion caused by a whim. Caprice.

15

The colours that seem to be all through my body of so many different emotions that precipitate as sadness. Ribbons of colour.

Anticipation, fear, anxiety, and memory—of course memory. The comings and goings of the boats, the sound of the ferries through the day, normal, regular. And the days of others, regular. I feel hollowed out.

The wind tossing and tossing the trees, their great shapes rocking, making it seem ever so much warmer inside, warmer than it is.

16

I wake at three or four o'clock in the morning these nights, for an hour or two. And I don't mind. It's quite a pure state, a feeling of being in the very middle of things, solitary and untouched. Thinking. My visual sense confined by the darkness, I know all that has occurred, or might. "Sometimes I think I can hear the words in the dream you are having." In the pouring rain, in the night, the clouds expose the moon, and cover it again, as though it were a wish.

17

Dreams. Every one of us dreams of glass. Sweating and dreaming. There are so many dreams inside me, pulling themselves out. My sentences won't become longer until I dream back my voice. Then the deer will come up to the place where I am sitting, but they don't come yet. I feel too old and tired now, like a potato down in the ground.

18

I had a restless day. Thoughts moved like hummingbirds. I was made for war. Today I am dangerously bored. Either flat anger or a soft enveloping dismay.

We never do get finished talking about anything. It would take one to be big-hearted, truthful rather than careful. We emerge from opposite caves, on hands and knees, holding small lights. We negotiate the darkness, the spatial comfort of our face-off.

19

You gave me an orchid and I let it rot, wondering what would happen, and having earlier, before you, discovered the great distance pears could shrink, if you just let them, hard wrinkles preserved, but pumpkins only go soft. I was curious about the flower. But you complained. "You don't have to watch it all the way through to its dead end, it's not for that."

20

When I am tired now, at the end of a day, I sit and look out and out. I am a snow man with black coals for eyes burning, sinking in. Put a huge C through the middle of the paper, over the x's and o's. Say the Cat has it.

Today I feel only what I lack. "She noted, without curiosity, the fact."

21

If a man is told that there are three hundred billion stars in the universe he will believe it. But if he is told that a bench has been painted he has to touch it to be sure. So how can I be sure to believe all the promises you have not given me, and why are my hands not covered with stars.

Fustian. Swollen with meaninglessness.

22

I must get rid of this voice of yours in my head, arguing, correcting my sentences, sitting on a rock and watching me from a short distance. You go away for ten days and the voice comes out like an earth worm. With fifteen or twenty days, and your absence, the voice would crawl away or be eaten by the robins. As it is, you return, and the voice grows, underground, fed by your own.

23

Your presence was around me like wings, like the beating and beating of wings.

24

For this year's flower you warned, "It doesn't last very long. Throw it away before you leave." I didn't. It lasted for weeks.

"Look at the mountains." And I wondered what it would be like standing up there, right at the top. You told me I didn't have to be able to imagine that in order to like the mountains.

Sometimes you're wrong, sometimes you're right.

25

While we were lying in bed, I hung on to you as though you were a post. I like the person who was in love with you. It's strange she seems so dead.

We almost laugh about her death. How unkind we are. How hot we are and how cold we seem. You are concerned about appearing vulnerable to me. You're not. You're absolutely seamless. Perhaps you lack a heart.

26

A dream again of the broken glass held inside the unbroken wine glass. The glass is shared.

You said, "I don't mind if I am right or wrong, I just want to know as soon as possible." It's the waiting that kills us. Today you are most

like a lake overcome by fog. I look out and can see nothing, and it's only blind faith that makes me know you are a lake overcome by fog.

27

She covers you with a soft marital blanket, over your eyes and ears and head. And somehow, you consent.

28

Bastard.

29

Am I germinating now? Is that why it is so dark and quiet? Green shoots beneath such hard black earth. Or green tomatoes. Sweet green tomatoes.

30

And now when I think of you there's a sense of chalk and paint. Your phrasings, your comings and goings, are scored in me. It's almost as though you don't need to exist any more, I carry what you produce inside me, like markings in a cave.

31

Now the path is grown over with weeds and there was no path. The book said, "My father lacks for nothing except the haliotis shells, but what these words really mean I do not know."

32

I have kept a journal on rice paper which absorbed the ink, so that the letters are padded things, gauze and thickness. There isn't a chronology, only lists, the way you wake from a dream and write it down single file, the marbles of the dream: glass goblets, cracked goblets, wailing sounds, day and night halved together.

33

There is something I want which the words only veil. And all the possible words are like stones, stepping stones in a creek; some don't lead to the other side.

The boat came in hot, making the water boil and swell under the dark lines of the dock where the light hit the racoon sitting on one of the rafters, gnawing and gnawing a shell, until the light shone on it and the shell dropped into the turgid sea.

For some reason, now, I keep expecting you to come around the corner or just sit down at my table, as someone would do, long absent. Take it as a sign of peace that I think this, or the begging side of joy.

And sometimes still, lying on my back on the grass and looking up through the leaves the way that light looks down, I think there is no reason I do not fly.