

ABANDONING

Nicole Foss

1. Looking

South of the Mason-Dixon Line

The walls of the glass grow deformed with condensation—
studded beads of perspiration a church congregation.

The surface draws water molecules together to practice the gravity of their religion.
As the pews grow crowded the congregants are moved to coalesce and begin
a paradoxical race downward
as each molecule
tumbling over the next
tries to be first to
make it to the bottom.

There is an honesty
in this lack
of heaven-bound aspiration.
We all came from the ground,
and we will all return to it.

They give each other words that no one wants to hold

Then,
They sit on the settee—
Lawn of emerald velvet
Lush like a field in some
Everblooming book.

Her hand bends the blades
This way and that.
Swiping nervously over
Wild fibers.

She passes
Trembling touch
Over warm fabric
Eyes refusing to lift from
The patterns created
Where the other
Sat.

Day Two of a Fever Which is Notoriously Inconsistent

Of the many miracles in the world, none is quite so particular as the fact that dust accumulating on a polished slanted stone surface does not avalanche without warning onto the shelf which waits below.

Warning Signs

She's like an emotional desiccant.

“DO NOT CONSUME”

Throw me away

I'm not good for you.

Throw me away

I'll hurt you.

Throw me away

I'll kill you.

Throw me away.

Throw me away.

Blinded

by cloudy skies
and rainy days.
Light filters in through the
Window,
Half his face lit by
Dimness, half by
Ambience.
A strange contradiction, light
Reflecting, bouncing off the clouds,
Brighter than
300 days of sunshine.
What a particular phenomenon.

Snow (a character study)

It clammers over rooftops
an aurora borealis on sidewalks and street surfaces
creating mountain ranges and crystal cliffs against doorways and on
the other side of pine islands.

It is a wintry whirlpool
now and again
taking a breath in a
Break from long windy exhales—those blustery blizzards.

(Un)remarkable

There are shoeprints on the blackboard
Geometric shapes where the rubber picked up
Chalk dust
Erasing an erasing.

The footsteps are around the height of a third grader's earlobe.
His name might be Sullivan.

It is 1:38 pm
No heelprints, only toes above my hip when standing.

Diving

As cream turns to clear
The wicks, finally caught,
Pop while the energy enters their bones
Stiff from coolness and rest—
Tiny black specks appear.

Revealed layer by layer
Edges smooth against that heavy pool
Melted wax becoming air becoming
 Solvent

There is a cloud of soot hovering in time
Shifting only as imperceptible breezes bend the three suns at the surface

Dalmatian spots in a glass jar;
White candles do not stay white candles
Once they are melting

Then, they are melting—revealing their history,
The joints that are
Buried in themselves
Always sunk
Or suspended—

White candles are only white from the outside.
He has Dalmatian spots beneath his freckles and I stay to watch him melt.

2. Echoes

Impulses and Echoingⁱ

I felt a funeral, in my Brain
An imperial affliction
And hit a world, at every plunge,
Like Stone—
Might I but moor—Tonight—
Before the door of God!
And crawl between
The stillness in the Room
In Corners—till a Day
Attended, or alone
First—chill—then stupor—then the letting go—

even emptiness is something

I feel I am a captive
On the cathedral wall
in the destroyed (and guilty) Theatre

Whose god? I asked—
flexing for the ascent—
I am a blur to them

Anybody can die, evidently. Few
Cold, delicately as the dark snow.
I give you all the years from then,
suddenly younger.

Lordly Composureⁱⁱ

Carrying a valise
Summer tea,
Daintily dressed.
Across the fields
 A light goes on.

Like daisies...or
Death—
Saturday nights and
Screaming fire.

A torch of sunlight and
What ought to be truth
Over a big oil drum or water tank
Pierced by an
Artificial smile.
Dismal birthday
—*Baby's birthday*

You... through the portieres.

...In the amber light...
He was just a boy with
An older man.
The room had two people in it
Coming suddenly into the light.

This doesn't always work.

She holds an afternoon,
Faded to dusk,
In her hands.

She holds complete surrender,
Inhuman abandon,
In her hands.

Brilliant Silk

[Interior]

Sit stiffly—
Carefully.
Baby,
Baby, he's a drunkard.
With a merciless glare
She nearly slips from my grasp.
Nearly.

I'm just about to drop.
I'd like to be left alone.
Her glance is anxious...
And I wonder.

His fingers find the opening of her blouse...
Like old Madonna pictures

Don't turn the light on—
Scarlet satin robe
Paper lanterns

She finds you
Making pigs of yourselves
Men are callous things.

She is drinking to escape.
Some people rarely touch it, but it touches them often.
The music is in her mind.

Some things are not forgivable.
False amiability
Brilliant silk
Deliberate cruelty.

Don't turn that light on.

Elysian Fields

[Setting]

Lordly composure and
Perpetual “blue piano”

Some people rarely touch it, but it touches them often.

[Enter]

A young collector; appearance incongruous.

The Elysian Fields,
Weathered grey
Tender blue
Invest in lyricism.

Flores para los muertos...
You don't know what anxiety feels like.
Desperate.
Flores para los muertos...

Long rainy afternoons.
It's a little piece of eternity.

Lurid shadows
Weathered grey in
Elysian Fields.
Not truth, but what ought to be.

Now I am a girl but one day I will marry a woman...

After Jamaica Kincaid

Now I am a girl but one day I will marry a woman—a peach-skin woman with red thicketed hair and green eyes, who wears jackets that are so beautiful I can easily entangle my mind in them. I would like to marry this woman and live with her in a bright apartment near the cliffs. In the bright apartment there will be seven windows and seven windowsills, a wall that hosts shelves, a bag of dirt, a kettle, one couch, two watering cans, two sets of gloves, one looking glass, two teacups, two saucers, two pairs of running shoes, two cans of pepper spray, two pride flags, one kitchen table, two wooden chairs, two handmade cushions to chase the lurking discomfort off our bones, two bookshelves for things we have very sporadic use for, one basket, one book of wallpaper swatches, one box filled with postcards from people who no longer speak to us, one raspberry tart wrapped in a letter from her mother, one small rug, one picture of two women standing in a forest, one picture of the same two women embracing, one picture of the same two women climbing a tree, one box of matches. Every day this peach-skin woman and I will eat raspberry tarts and drink tea for breakfast, hide on balconies and throw lopsided compliments at people we don't understand, see garden centers, pick plants, breathe the air from the plants we have picked, replace pinecones in the forest, put on short dresses with fancy coats and offend grumpy old men on their way home from the office, go shopping and buy only the ugliest potatoes to roast and have for dinner, steal fresh herbs to eat for dinner with the roast potatoes. Every day we would do this. Every night I would recite this woman a poem; the words I don't know yet, but the shape is in my head. This woman I would like to marry knows many things, but to me she will only tell about things that would never dream of making me bored; and every night, over and over, she will tell me something that begins, "I once heard that." I will marry a woman like this, and every night, every night I will be completely happy.

1. A Necessarily Flawed Dedication

After Anne Carson

A house gives off its own light
carpenters say.

If all the stars in the sky went out
you could still walk these halls
by what shines from them.

Fair seer I offer merely a metaphor

A hesitation.

Use hesitation instead of statement or speech
a hesitation in wood
as you would say a poem in prose or a bride in white.
So van Eyck
of *The Ghent Altarpiece*

which was stolen in twelve pieces in transaction from Belgium
to Germany (1934).

What is hesitating?
Reason I guess.
That imagining place as my mother called it.
Hear how the word
Stands.

What I Have Been Doing Lately

After Jamaica Kincaid

What I have been doing lately: I was standing in the doorway and a bird sang. I stepped outside. Reluctantly. I examined the tree. Everything was there. I turned around. Either it was cloudy or the sun was taking some time off and the sun was tired. I opened my eyes and the clouds or the absent sun looked like recycled newspaper. I turned east. I turned west. I was compelled to wander east. While wandering east I knew that I didn't have any stones in my hands and that is why I was wandering so far. While wandering east I looked down and saw the planet earth and said "It could soon be midday." I saw a snake in the pond. The pond had no water. I said, "A snake. Can't hear anything. A snake." I wandered for something like a long time before I came upon a very large hill. The very large hill was green and glittering and looked as if it had been a structure structured by centuries. I wanted to live inside it but I couldn't dig. I wanted to live inside it but it would take me a life to get a shovel. I wanted to live inside it but it would take me eons to walk down the staircase. Hours passed and then one year, wanting to, I lifted the ground and dove in.

3. After

Stopwatch

I returned until nothing was old
And everything was routine.
Sandpapered new,
I tread the same path until
The view was unrecognizable.

I am thought spirals.

I walked that same hike
Until sunsets needed studying
And trees were yet to be word-ified.

I looked at this world until I saw it for the first time;
And I pictured your face until I forgot it—
Then, we met each other.

ⁱ These two centos are entirely composed of lines taken from poems found in the Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry.

ⁱⁱ This is a series of three poems using found language from the play *Streetcar Named Desire*.