

Pattie McCarthy

L&O

LRL e-editions

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Acknowledgments

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LRL e-editions
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Series Editors: Julia Drescher, Ash Smith, and C.J. Martin

liminal :

for Sarah Dowling

—Well I was pregnant at the time, & he delivered babies.
—Alice Notley, “Doctor Williams’ Heiresses”

honest work— that makes me feel verbatim.
the widow says : *sorrow is my own yard*. I don't
have to look it up. it is one of the poems
I've accidentally memorized & when
he was in the hospital I could recite it to him.

honest work— the same
bones, only
compressed. apologies
for the delay, someone left
a package on the train. the army
experience center at Franklin
Mills Mall includes three mission
simulators, a café & lounge. all your
recyclables in one bin! *ring in*
the frost upon them freedom
from fire. in fact, people are not
particularly kind to pregnant women. I have never

been offered a seat on the subway. on flight
2573 (PHL to FLL)
everyone looks
away as I stow
my bag overhead. it is hard
to fly to Ft Lauderdale in grief. everyone else
is on vacation. *my own yard*

the grass is long

October tenth

it was so much empty
air to fill with ocean. it resists
singularity & seasonality.
it arrives just in time. it sets
time. it counts
down to itself. it manufactures
its own importance. it is
very important & makes
everyone happy. it is never

arriving even as it arrives.

I listen hard when the bells

early for an appointment I sat

in Independence Mall to be

in the official weather.

ring down the leaves

please stop saying important

things in code. a bronzed

boy rings in the sea

a child (a boy) bouncing

a ball (a blue ball)

I listen hard.

ring out the grackle (how odd to find

you here, vidua-bird)

a greenglass insulator— its substance

: the real physical matter of which

a person or thing consists & has

a tangible, solid presence

: the quality of having a solid

basis in reality or fact

: the quality of being dependable or stable
not yet rain, in fact
it is very bright (honest
work) one walks outside
& finds that it is very bright indeed
ring for the children of my friend
who no longer hears
them ring in that area
of the city that flashes
time & temperature & time
& temperature & PECO
wishes you a good evening—
withheld upon advice of my attorney.

I come to the coffee
shop to grade
papers & my toddler
is at nursery school— I am
paying for both
(coffee & nursery
school) & a troop of moms

& toddlers arrive & I
should have stayed
home with my own
kid & had free
coffee & graded
nothing.

all the usual margins.

honest work— a busy kind of diction
limning out *a greenglass*
insulator make these calculations
more complicated. *ring in the new*
baby [. . .] open well its eyes
love & wrestling
were brothers on the *Mayflower*
& (one assumes) thereafter.
katie & timothy
mccarthy were not
(presumably) siblings on the *Titanic*.

& thereafter? *contraction rings under
the skin* grávida 2, para 1 (for the moment). I listen hard.
the people's plaza between
Anderson & Gladfelter Halls is no
more empty than usual in rain.
that is, it is always empty. I am
always above it. nothing loves
the space between two towers.

a boy
bouncing
a ball

*catches it (with his
left hand)*

a boy waving
a lettuce leaf—
wild before the vegetables.
he falls
asleep with a hard
roll in his left hand.

he eats a freshly
fallen orange
autumn leaf before
anyone can stop him
(you're doing good work there)

*he who has kissed
a leaf*

need look no further
in galoshes & yellow
slicker he wants to be down
the ocean in a hurricane.
that makes me feel verbatim.
I listen hard when the bells

it was so much
empty out-of-seasonality.
it counts
down to itself, coiled
wires & round
ligaments, *rings under the skin—*

could have recited, but didn't.
sublingual (that means we
can't talk about it?) & honest
work— it's easy to disappear
completely into it.

masses of flowers

(in lieu of flowers, please)

masses of flowers—

flat worsted flowers

a cluster of birdsbreast flowers

on a red stem six feet high

a bunch of violets clutched

out of complicated mathematics

among the daffodils

daffodil time

is past

hyacinth time

in

the hospital garden

a flower or two picked
from mud
a pink petal
 intact upon the ground
(I said petals from an appletree)
the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf
fists of flowers
where the salvias, hard carmine—
slendercrimson
moonshaped
the effect against
this winter where
they stand—is crimson—
with excellent precision
the tulip bed
among the zinnias
and verbenas,
fragile among the red
trumpeted petunias
red where in whorls
the white daisy

is not
enough
one trumpeted wide flower
wild carrot taking
the field by force
a mustard flower
 and not a mustard flower
yellow, yellow, yellow, yellow!
it is not a color
the last yarrow
on the gutter
a pair of prickly blue
flowerets
the red flowerets
 curled back
forsythia a blond
straight-
legged girl
 a bunch of garden roses
she was keeping
 on ice

oyer :

I have dreamed of you so much

there is no time left to write

—John Yau, “Borrowed Love Poems”

everything begins with A. we can measure
this (in centimeters) with a body.
you are building something quietly
inside. it is made of something round, some
thing elbow- or knee-
shaped. something quiet. or shaped
like the curve of his head or heel. (where did
he learn the word 'artichoke'?) we stay in
our house, safely, & are safely inside
how we love our house. the day's small shopping.
I said : no no no no please please please please
(it's snowing). he said : repetition is
a metronome of pain. we can measure this.
campfires, cities, whole continents flicker.

make it hard for me & I'll make it
impenetrable for you. crafting
a code & its key simultaneously,
though a cipher is preferable
(the former is cumbersome & unflexible).
swags of pine, the day's familiar. you need
language where you sit. the room where
our house is slowly (& with much old-world
gentility) falling apart. he coats
his fingers in antebellum plaster
dust— the damp creeps (as they say) & his fingers
plug the faucet. isn't there anything
beautiful in decay anymore? you squirm.
I felt [your] bare foot from the inside.

welcome to the weather here. it's snowing—
in quotation marks, in the courtyard
below, in the parentheses
of streetlights, in between contraction
rings under the skin. the snow fell in ash as if.
"I love you this summer." cities flicker.
you have to get a fox, a chicken,
& a sack of corn across a river.
you are standing at the top of the stairs
with an infant, a toddler, the big fire
truck, & a laptop. one needs to get
to the coffeeshop earlier & earlier
these days— the hipsters have started rise
& shining. I am too much your mother.

the apex of babble, your steeped
thinking fingers, future piano
(without you it's a waste of time).
it's a shame we aren't nearer to water.
all of a sudden— here you are (this
division, this terrible division).
consider this (precipitous) — labor,
repetition, metronome— turns out
there *is* such a thing as repetition
(for that matter, there is such a thing
as insistence too). everything begins.

[stop pushing, try to stop pushing]
sooner or later, every language loses
its sounds. there is nothing to be done about it.

hypothetical & new like if we
re-made an alphabet from scratch (Asher
begins with A). apple always apple.
symmetry & E. always egg. always elephant.
always one two three. hot tea. milk & honey.
call it hope. call it dread. add these to your
dry ingredients in equal measure.
throw architecture into reverse.
watch ocean. hopcopter. po-po-taxi.
[stop, try to stop] & I could not stop
& I thought— this is our last
moment alone— & I could not stop
& from a tight curl you pushed off underwater
(when the fall is all (that's left)).

(on maternity, 3/30/09)

2:00 a.m. be happy silent moony beams. 3:40 a.m. drinking water while you nurse makes me feel like a ventriloquist. 7:00 a.m. watch little butter. nice baby. achoo Asher. 8:30 a.m. typing one-handed. make explicit the caesura. lovely, that. (8:45 a.m. pump. nothing to say, not a squeak.) 10:10 a.m. left right left— & uneven all day hereafter. 10:55 a.m. welcome to the weather. 12:55 p.m. winter came up under the house. 4:50 p.m. as a coda to winter, add a coda to winter. 6:45 p.m. your mouth opens, shiny & whitewashed. Asher pillow. in the grammar of gestures, that means I am hungry. that means I am sleepy. that means I am a warm loaf of bread. 8:15 p.m. stay quietly inside the house. it expands to meet you. true, that. 9:50 p.m. the baby turns his face into a bright penny. the baby turns his face into his brother's face, into sleep, into no sleep. the baby turns his face into his face. 11:00 p.m. small things that have no words.

(tangent on paternity, 4/9/09)
watch cable with me, I'll grow out of this grief
eventually. it's a nice little
bottle of wine. he was a great talker.
& so they are ever returning to us, the dead.
(this really is what I was teaching when he died.)
you put a foot to my ribs (from inside)
& closed debate on whether you, not yet
born (at that time), & he, recently
dead, were in the same place. consider this,
this precipitous division.
a mark is the opposite of space.
everything begins. every language loses its sounds.
it was a strange conversation, between someone who knew nothing but
a great many words & one who knew everything but not a single word.

because I want advice on how to live
I left him a love note— it employed the word *ibid.*
on the phone he misheard ‘what’s happening’
as ‘it happened again’ & then it happened
again. I rang the well-baby nursery
bell & she made swift index finger circles
around her mouth & said ‘a little
dusky’ — I wondered what they would do if I
made a barricade, a spectacle, a blockade
of myself so recently delivered—
on the nursery doorsill. this would make
an impression, a barricade, a blockade.
make explicit the caesura.
here’s a light. I hope this helps.

(faculty activity report, 4/15/09)

3:55 a.m. that is to say the baby is made
largely of milk. 6:20 a.m. early waking, happy
larking. your two-month old, week four. (8:20 a.m. pump. nothing to say.)
8:40 a.m. *honors literature, reading, writing*. (10:20 a.m. pump. not
a squeak.) 10:40 a.m. *modern poetry*. (11:35 a.m. pump. blank blank blank
blank.) 12:00 p.m. *poetry workshop*. 3:30 p.m. what did everyone eat &
how much & when & how much?
5:45 p.m. left right left— now
I'll be uneven all night. 7:00 p.m. peek-a-boo, your kicking feet, I'm
thinking of the sea. 7:40 p.m. I wanted to be with you alone & talk about
The Weather. the sink is full of dishes, the baskets are full of laundry, the
babies have full noses. 8:15 p.m. reconnoiter the familiar, the catholic's love
of repetition. 9:00 p.m. 'potatoes' he calls his own little bones & offered
them up to be eaten.

but why didn't you draw the pretty birds,
Asher? which is a lie— he can't draw yet.
the whole city flickers. your kicking feet.
she said, nurse! give me something— I want
to go to sleep. & the nurse said, you are
sleeping. & thereafter she was quiet.
too bad there's no time to work on poems
today. the baby rolls the ball again
down the sloping radiator cover
again again. the whole house slopes. teach
a poem about birth & get overactive
letdown (hereafter OALD).
I think of the best lines while nursing, then
forget. why try to revive the lyric [?]

at the boy's birth in whom the iron shall cease—
apologies, I ignored you to write
a poem about you. eight teeth, six steps,
four words : Asher, dada, light, cow. my dad's
number was always fifteen— I wonder why.
smile on crabs— I see his blue eye.
orange fishes big water— I want to kiss him.
I think you can see in the dark forget
you can't see in the dark. you can find me—
root noodle. apple, always apple. ape,
sometimes artichoke. always egg, always
elephant. a lady in foxes, yes.
in the beginning I was a little
thing in the center of a star—

the color once known as 'ashes of roses,'
a growing understanding of what's called
object permanence, a fixed-do system.
more poem : a lady in foxes, yes
Emmett, a lady in foxes, yes but
Asher wants a cow. Asher wants a cow.
everything begins whole cities flicker
 (snow snow) every language loses its sounds.
he turns his face toward the thin bone of street
light, says 'light' turns his face into his face.
he says 'listen' — takes my head, puts my ear
to his— & I swear I can hear the sea.
this isn't a negotiation.
an arrow of geese flap forward toward expression.

(opens in a house) it's a different
alphabet. wars get worse at the end— they
don't wind down. it's amateur night— stay in.
a small warm room at the top of the house—
blood spots do not indicate a fertilized
egg mass candling methods if
desired, the spot can be removed with
the tip of a clean knife. these eggs are safe
to eat (go to work on one). I hold
the sleepy baby & lose all ambition.
a small warm room at the top of the house—
shh Asher shh shh Asher Asher shh
[too much too much too much your mother]
click here to hear the empty house—

I recall the touching

optimism of multiplication.

again again again— he says— no no

no no. & then he shakes his head so

that he ends up dancing. the no-no dance.

the baby raises his arms (because he

believes me & I pick him up— the baby

nurses to sleep & believes he will nurse

again). it's a big house & we are always

anyway in the same room, all of us.

we need language where we sit (the apex

of babble) & we fail at weaning (I

love the Scottish 'wean' : contraction of *wee*

one). we shall sow our cabbages together.

so let me tell you what I love : oil, vinegar, salt, lettuce, brown bread,
butter, cheese & wine, a windy day, a fireplace, the children nearby—
nine words : Asher, dada, light, cow, doggie, cracker, fishes, pigeon,
again. the seaside town that they forgot to close down (come come). he
says : it's a V— it's a seagull— I sing a seagull (screech)— did you see that
seagull sound, that big ocean crash.

when he was born, I slept with my shoes on for the first week.
when you were born, I didn't need to sleep with my shoes on but
planned for it anyway. you crouch over the magnadoodle, action magna-
doodling. reconnoiter the familiar, whole cities flicker. we can measure
this (& a house is a house for me). antebellum plaster, paint
flakes, PBSkids.

he says : sparrow, one two & one sparrows, a house finch, a starling, look
—three mourning doves. she went downstairs (all the birds were on paper)

who was Mary Shelley? her mother
wanted a midwife. her father didn't.
this is a story told as though it is
true. I don't know whether or not it is.
the bird in the book the book on the bed
the boy in the bed— the big bed goodnight
goodnight (are you scared? I don't want to
be scared) goodnight the bird in the book
the book on the bed the boy in the bed
once there was a little boy by the name
of Emmett & sometimes he was again
& sometimes he was a little boy & sometimes
again (the bird in the book) I watch it
flap with slow, awkward beats over the trees.

a lytle house wel fylled a lytle grounde well
tylled & a litle wife wel willed is best.
in games : the place in which one is free from attack;
the point which one tries to reach; the goal.
the route from *housewife* (which should always be
hausfrau, really) to *hussy*— this historical
trip via pejoration & metaplasmus.

he's crowning (corona) (ring)—
he said : it's a halo or halo- (that is
sea, salt, or adapting to live in the sea) hence,
by extension, to other things in the form
of a circle or ring, a corona

or halo (breathe the baby out) sweet dreams
form a shade o'er my lovely infant's head.

& family is not 'personal.' outside the forest. also.
the sun goes down as one is walking, at dusk.
hopping fat sparrows. he doesn't want to share
& he doesn't want the baby to cry
& I say : if you don't share, he will cry.
so they both cry. the common sparrow
inquisitive. the baby monitor
crackles, static, says : moo, mmm, mmm, ma-ma.
without you walking is a waste of time.
fill in the blanks : when I am hungry I
when I am thirsty I when I am tired
a quietism of a sparrow alone
upon the housetop & the solitary
bird under the evesings.

there is no room in the car for the mothers, so they run behind— this is
a terrible book. let's not read it again. what something else can we do?
liminal, bog-heavy, I run home the half-block from the subway only to
miss bedtime anyway & go, leaky, to sleep. inexpert— yes, I am inexpert.
often delightedly so. what something. the soft
glow of a halo, the soft glow reading
microfiche. you need language where you sit still
safely inside how we love our house the boy in the bed the big bed
the boy still safely inside (no) whole cities flicker
you are asleep before I realize
you have butter in your hair.
you smell delicious— like butter & summer & early evening ice cream.
 at night I kiss three people minutes later
they are all sound asleep

how the alphabet was made : [he] took a marrowbone
and sat mousy-quiet for ten whole minutes.
the shape of your ear pressed into my bicep
(a disappearing fossil) tilting daylight
moon mourning dove radar put your feet small
in the water your boy feet repeating.
it was anecdotal episodic
fractured narrative making scrambled eggs
peachy cheeks pancakes fingerprint letters
I hear the moon knocking in the treehouse
in the bathroom the playroom the nursery
transitive intransitive I can nurse
you & you can nurse but you can't nurse me.
listen : your initials on the moon.

notes & acknowledgements :

liminal :

This poem was brought to you by the Kelly Writers House, University of Pennsylvania. Written for the event "William Carlos Williams and the Women: the Legacy of WCW at 125," on 11 November 2008. With many thanks to Jessica Lowenthal, organizer & host, & to my fellow participants : Sarah Dowling, Jena Osman, & Michelle Taransky. Includes much quotation & thievery from many poems by WCW (e.g. everything after the second *masses of flowers* is quotation).

October - November 2008.

oyer :

I. 1. Gertrude Stein. *A Book of Alphabets & Birthdays*.

14. Paul Muldoon. "Cradle Song for Asher." *Moy Sand & Gravel*.

II. 1 - 2. Marcella Durand. *Traffic & Weather*.

14. Sasha Steensen. "The Stranger at the Gates." *The Method*.

III. 1. "Oy Cub Asher." a collaboration by Ian Davisson, Joey Yearous-Algozin, Jeremiah Rush Bowen, Duncan Regan, Greg Laynor, & Frank Sherlock.

4 - 5. William Carlos Williams, "The Birth."

14. Susan Howe, *The Souls of the Labadie Tract*.

IV. 1. Roman Jakobson, qtd. in Daniel Heller-Roazen. *Echolalias: On*

the Forgetting of Language.

13 - 14. Heller-Roazen. *Echolalias.*

V. 1. William Blake, "Cradle Song."

6 - 7. Samuel Beckett, "Krapp's Last Tape."

14. Margaret Wise Brown, *A Child's Goodnight Book.*

VI. 1 - 2. Eleni Sikelianos, "Lovebook," *Body Clock.*

14. *The Lion in Winter.*

VII. 1 - 2. Anselm Berrigan, "Zero Star Hotel," *Zero Star Hotel.*

4. W.G. Sebald, *The Emigrants.*

13 - 14. Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter & Forgetting.*

VIII. 1. Cathy Wagner, "Everyone in the Room is a Representative of the World at Large," *My New Job.*

14. CA Conrad & Frank Sherlock, *The City Real & Imagined.*

IX. 1. George Oppen, "Sara in Her Father's Arms."

14. Walter Benjamin, on his son Stephan, *Walter Benjamin's Archive.*

X. 1-2. Chaim Potok, *My Name is Asher Lev.*

4-6. Joan McCarthy, in conversation.

14. Hoa Nguyen, "Up Nursing." *Hecate Lochia.*

XI. 1. Virgil, *Eclogue 4.*

13 - 14. Mathias Svalina, "Creation Myth." *Destruction Myths* (35).

XII. 1. John Ashbery, "Vertiver."

2 - 3. "Your baby this week" newsletter, Babycenter.com

11 - 12. James, "Sometimes (Lester Piggott)." *Laid.*

14. Jules Boykoff, "The Slow Motion Underneath." *Hegemonic Love Potion.*

XIII. 1 - 2. Kate Greenstreet, "Goodbye." *Trickhouse* vol. 8.

2 - 3. Donald L. Miller, WWII historian, on *Radio Times* WHYY, 15 March 2010.

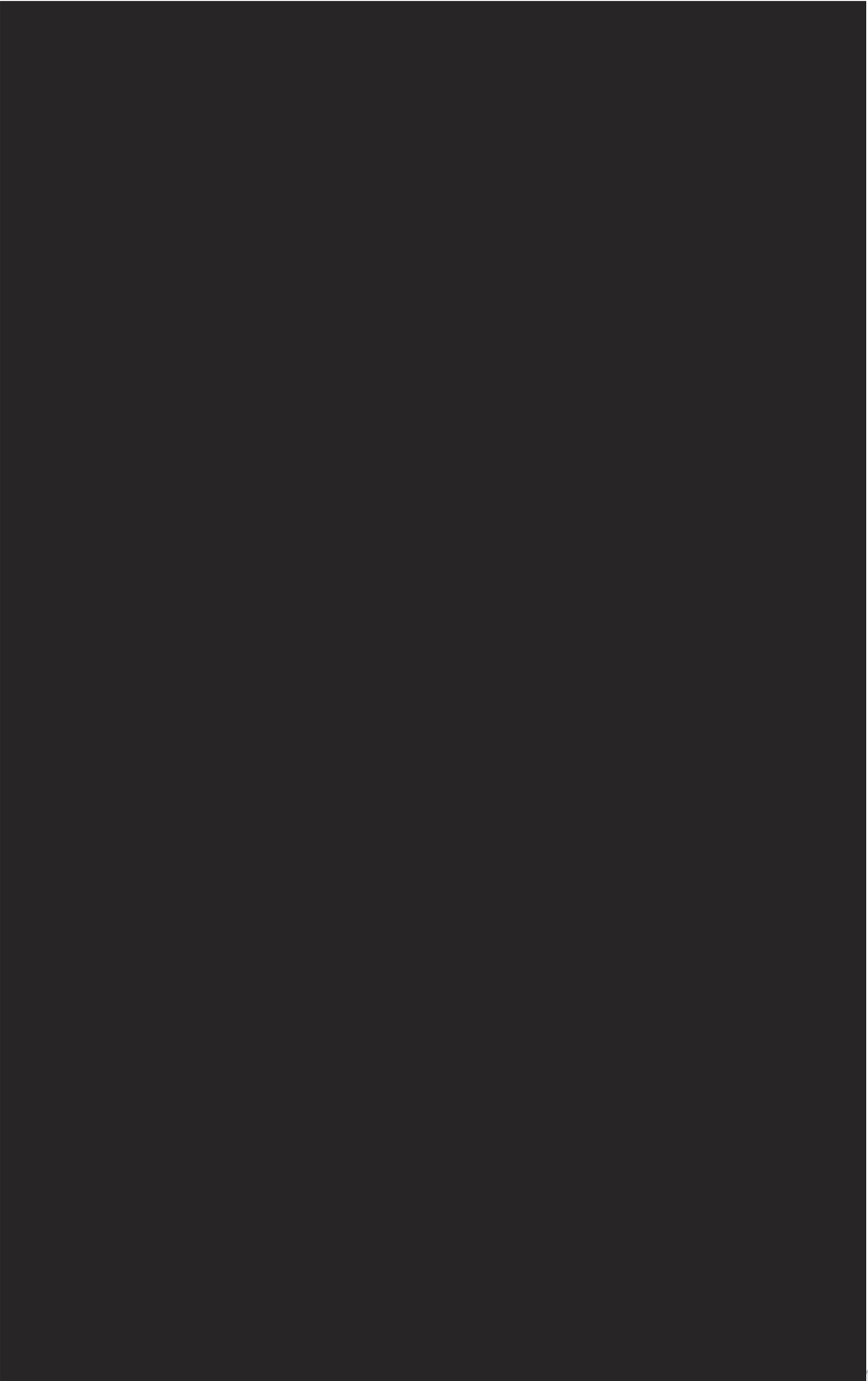
5-7. [eggssupersitions\(bloodspotonyolk\).http://whatscookingamerica.net/Eggs/FAQ.htm](http://eggssupersitions(bloodspotonyolk).http://whatscookingamerica.net/Eggs/FAQ.htm)

14. Jessica Lowenthal, excerpt of a poem (unknown title) on the back of a chair at Kelly Writers House.

XIV. 1 - 2. Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender.*

14. Lorine Niedecker, "Thomas Jefferson."

- XV. 1 - 2. Fanny Howe, "O'Clock." *Selected Poems*.
11. Mary Ann Hoberman, *A House is a House for Me*.
14. Jen Hofer, "escaped mourning dove." *as far as*.
- XVI. 1. Lorine Niedecker, "[Who was Mary Shelley?]"
5. Susan Marie Swanson, *The House in the Night*.
14. Allison Cobb, *Green-Wood*.
- XVII. 1 - 2. Richard Taverner, *The garden of wysdom* 1539 (qtd. in OED).
- 3 - 4. OED, from a definition of 'home'
- 10 - 12. OED, from definitions of 'halo' & 'halo-'
13. "What to expect when the baby's crowning" <http://www.pregnancy.org/article/what-expect-whenbabys-crowning>
- 13 - 14. William Blake, "Cradle Song."
- XVIII. 1 - 2. Leslie Scalapino, *The Forest is in the Euphrates River*.
- 6 - 7. Camille Guthrie, "A Memorable Fancy." *In Captivity*.
- 12 - 14. Samuel Beckett. *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1929 - 1940*. Vol. I. (pg. 257, n. 3 pg. 262).
- XIX. 1 - 2. Jean de Brunhoff, *The story of Babar, the little elephant*. trans. Merle Haas.
8. I owe 'inexpert' to Kaia Sand's *Remember to Wave*.
- 13 - 14. Maureen Owen, "BEDTIME" from *Zombie Notes*.
- XX. 1 - 2. Rudyard Kipling, "How the Alphabet was Made." *Just So Stories*.
14. Michael Gizzi, "An Old-Fashioned." *New Depths of Deadpan*. February 2009 - June 2010.



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