“You!” whose fine fingers fill the organic cells,
with virgin earth, of woods and bones and shells

Erasmus Darwin, *The Botanic Garden* 1789
Impulse

_Ε conchis omnia:_ or everything from shells. From deep swell of pearls and urchins the brain becomes.

Breath ignites each cell with mud and moss, stones and husks; rock breakwater, milk and reef.

The skull a spongy bed, a cradle for the late voice of God, blurred cadence of waves.

_Deckember 26, 7:59 a.m._
the earth jolts the casing cracked. Plates lipped in iron, aglow with tremors, water hulks and swells, each fissure a blue surge.

And each enclosed embroidery, soft pink and sinking to pulp; thatched roofs of sunken rooms and a chiasma of colors, violet hues of the drowned.

Hollow craniums arrive like conchs with the tide, bones and shells white bleach of sun. Rubble of salt-soaked, broken parts.

_What work now to do:_
to find coconut husks a whelk, a sponge, a cavity to put these thoughts into.

Among weeds and tumbled cement, we wrestle with impulses, wing-like and wet, our minds
scuttling like hermit crabs in the crumbles—
the transmigration of souls
through ruined mangroves.
“White petals, creaseless and ambitious,
may I break your even weave, loosen your knot”

Jorie Graham, *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts*
Enquiry

We can hear you
sharpening your tag-teeth,

spreading your marmalade
with iron filings,

gesturing as you walk
to throw seeds

of our names.
How can we answer back—

moisture, darkness
hoof?
Anemones

Last night while I slept I swam through the Atlantic;
diving off the Cape of Good Hope
I glided, whale-deep
over the arc of mountains—
basalt filling metallic seams
while fish gathered in my veins.

Brushed by scores of gorgeous arms my eyes
gleamed white like your wood-bright blooms, wet blink of spring.

Plucked from the sands of Egypt, pressed like a poultice to Christ’s chest,
“consider,” he whispers, wind-charmed,
“the lilies of the field!”

Meaning you, Anemone, hoarded by Caetini in his garden,
bright splay oh holy red.

But what to bring. A blue hat?
Plastic bags? I had a map,
the grooves of my palm,
my skin to sense the light,
a chilled descent.

You mark the flow of plankton
I swim through,
my pockets full of ocean-tones and gulps of wind,

each cell tolling some distant bell,
bodies unaware of their cry and scribbled nebulae.
Asparagus

In white we watch the traverse of earth
Of all our loam-ache we make

at last small crowns  our long lily tongues
still tucked and lilacs mulling

We know you are up there looking
watching the melt  wracked with slumber

resolving at last to get up and move rocks
if only to see the white worms curl in on themselves

Again and again you come to this place
pull back the grass  touch our wild

tops  make promises  like the water does
tracing its dirt labyrinth paths

collecting at last at the splayed landmark
the place where spring keeps snapping

our green shoots  raw in your hand
selfish  claiming the last word
Peony
for EJ

At night the buds
sway on a black screen,

ultrasound of ephemerals
—false mermaid,
trout lily, hepatica:
green in the dark.

Black ants prowl
the taut green globe,
hunting this sweetness—
antennae twitch
like commas, blink
and twine, preoccupied.

The growth comes
budded and guttural,
_a noiseless noise_
among the leaves…
gathers, takes root.

A squirm of stem,
wave-length of leaves,
spine as soft as a hand
in sleep.

An instant. Shake
the bulb so filaments sing,
a chime of broken things
in white glass space.

The growth comes
as a stuttered dance—
a trembling push, light
and the little ants.

Swell up, blaze up:
the summer terminus.
Grip of gray-green haze—
August’s iridescence.
Delphinium

To Marie Curie

Ore Mountains above a town
where corks and bobbin lace
are made, stones gleaming
like brass doorknobs.

Storm clouds annunciate dark blue,
strobes of gold, Bohemia.
Pitchblende secretes

a stratum of midnight sounds—
hiss of cast-iron, shriek
of owls, a hoarse
unhinging. Radium.

In the rain, staked and tied
with strings: delphinium.

Wet wind loosens
buds from the nodes
(those corset eye-hooks
straining against breath),

each purple gasp of petals
a violent moment, gape
of wonder at the pull,
the sudden yank back—
towards what?

A dolphin leap of the heart
unraveling rare earths,

high atmosphere and distant
light, all the fragile cells
tugging at their centers—
granules glowing
on fingertips,

and the wind—splitting
and scattering the blue tower,
gust of fringed
and radiant wings.
Lily

Each night I die
under the weight of air
and the clipped warmth

White pines mark
the edge of my house

the wide petaled space
curbed in dark cords

Each word
makes a spool of sun

winds the upright sexes
folds up my hybrid-tongue

Each line around me

gathers the light claims
one color
and another thorn

and vermillion
white and fledgling thrush

I risk that dusk
has tucked each stanza
in its blue envelope

that the light filling the other
lilies has vanished

drifted out over the wet
field let go
its muscular voice
Gentian

let me guide myself with the blue, forked touch of this flower
down the darker and darker stairs, where blue is darkened on blueness.

— D.H. Lawerence

Not the yellow smirk
of hyssop nor the bright
breath still pressed in the lungs

of Umberto Pelizzari
as he plunged salt-deep
two-hundred thirty-six feet.

Blue to pleat shadows
pull and engulf the gleams
in flaming skirts.

Umbrella of sea-weight
over the Mariana trench—
blueness darkening,
blazing down through
an echo rock-dark,
words don’t come out,

but pass away
sinking dark-blue to dwell
on the abyssal plain.

Hanging our heads
tongued and flickering
like cepheids we

blue flowers are lost to
the dark red shift,
family of bitterness.
Crocus

After the Aegean wall paintings of Xeste 3 depicting young women harvesting saffron from Crocus sativus, a plant used medicinally for nearly four millennia

Near the lustral basin,
where wet plaster meets
wet earth: a few purple blooms.

The girls have paused here:
one in a diaphanous blouse,
one with a bleeding toe.

Dawn comes blond and hairless,
burnished in a lilac cape.

Then noon – hot light,
yellow ocher of autumn
when hearts immobilize
like dragonflies, poised
on the eyes of fish.

Sluice through wet earth
to rush blood to the genitals,
fill baskets with buds,
yellow cusped in white.

* 

Small petals coif the fingers
in a purple grasp, pistils
smear each finger-pad,
nerve to nerve.

Hematite blurs a vulval
red, a smudge of paint.
Shudder of umbones
where new tissue grows,
a flightless bird.

And two iris-eyes,
two bulbs upturned; caught light
like winter aconite, the hood
pulled bright and taut.

*

At last a cascade
of crocus from a ruptured wall,
runnel of cilia plumed
to every inner seam.

Small strands adorn
her goddess face: creases
splayed like prisms—
the dart of swallows,
a shiver of fish, dragonflies
perched with wing tips touching.

Lip to lip the girls whisper in
odors — the colors untold,
savored, gold.
Blue Violets

How do you pray, all of you, crowded in the half-shade?

I’ve forgotten what blue or deeper purple your petals blush, what bruise.

I come with scissors, find a fragrance I beg from the stem, gulp through a wetness.

I can’t blame you for your confusion, looking up at the black branches, studded with shrill chandeliers, the male and female pairings.

Are you hurrying? The canopy shifts—green fills in, laden with June.

You are no more blue than I am kneeling here, my hands in the dirt grasping the thin roots and flecking the dirt off, cold and rich and mica-stunned.

I suck from your throat a sweet nectar, fill myself to sickness. You collapse like veins as I pull the prayer from you, thin and colorless.
Cyclamen

The only place to put you
is there on the windowsill
over the radiator, wrapped in foil.

Grocery items: avocado,
salmon, potatoes, white wine.
I’ve walked down these aisles

with you, suggested lemon juice,
the kind that comes in a plastic,
squeezable lemon.

You’ve wanted me to look at spring
like this: through glass and plastic,
the sex of it, cold fluorescence.

On the end of silver stems we talk
in a casual tone – white, pink, red,
as though we’d turned inside out,

settled like corms into snow
and ice, chills stunted by the tree-
dark; slow pulse of circulating

heat, white snow white marrow.
Staying alive would depend
on turning right side out, making

organs out of new green leaves
and blood out of roots
and love out of leftover dirt.

Let alone, the distance twists
and whines like cellophane,
passes through anonymous hands.

Each shelf is stocked row by row
with all things made
and unmade, long corridors

of sugared delights, well-lit
and gleaming in air-tight glory,
each waiting to be consumed,
to be eaten whole,
returned to that bulbous place,
the wet dark home.
Enquiry

Our eyes cast downward
to the dark dewed stems,

plain green design, where
Theophrastus found

the soul of us – all
our upward motion

dripping, anointed.
Bell gleam and rollicked

we shade ourselves, we
listen to the sun.

The loss of order,
an aching brilliance.

What net of names, what
indigenous end?
Notes:

Enquiry

Erasmus Darwin, 1731 - 1802, poet & physician, would prescribe iron shavings mixed with marmalade for his anemic patients.

Anemones

See Matthew 6:28 – 29 “And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.”
- The “lilies of the field” are considered by many scholars to be Anemone coronaria
See also the Song of Soloman 5:13

Francesco Caetini, Duke of Semoneta, was said to have 29,000 anemones in his garden at Cisterna. The flowers were very popular in the 16th century

Peony

“A noiseless noise/ among the leaves” taken from Keats, “I Stood Tiptoe Upon a Little Hill”

Delphinium

Marie and her husband Pierre Curie announced their discovery of radium in 1898 after studying uranium ore or “pitcheblend” found in the Ore Mountains above the town of Jáchymov, former Czechoslovakia

Marie was the first woman to receive a Nobel prize. She died from leukemia in 1934.

Crocus


Gentian

Epigraph taken from “Bavarian Gentians” by D.H. Lawerence

The Mariana trench is the deepest known trench on earth, where the ocean floor reaches 35,840 feet below sea level

Enquiry

Theophrastus, a pupil of Aristotle, wrote the first known book about the plant world in the 3rd Century BC. The Book was called Historia plantarum or Enquiry into Plants
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Moore, Gerry, PhD, Director of Science at the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, New York. Interview by Claire Cheney on taxonomy, the New York Metro Flora project and philosophy of classification and nomenclature.


