

Wrongheaded

Elaine Feeney

1. |hand fast|

The women are here to count,
 To sit together and carve out arms
To bury their dead, to feed their living,
 When they are done they
Dance in the end clutches of their spat energy,
 Bone of bone's, sharp cuckoo barrage

Sweet desire,

All spent.

2. |liquescence|

How to Contour the Face to make things Pop

Use a primer. Wash it on generously. Lather it. Then begin by painting your forehead bone, next the temples, sides of your nose, chin, and hollows of your cheeks with iridescent highlight. Next, with Lavinia Fontana's stoke as she puts the belly on Cupid and the nose on Venus, flick straight fluid brown lines parallel to them. Buff, bust and burst the brush to sfumato the skin, we must all blend in. And without moving the tiny face hairs far, keep small tight circles, stay in a small circles, remain moving the wrist, but keep it tight, sweep, cover and accentuate the cheek bones, although this face is so thin now, perhaps best to consider plumping it out with a pop of colour: *Love Lorn, Girl about Town, Likeable or Milan Mode* are all delicious pinks for bringing back life to a dead pallor. No need to curl the eyelashes. The eyes will be closed.

3. |vanishing|

And if they have any spirit left

They know to save it for one another

They will only feel by leaning back

Upon each other

Mapping done deeds

Paying heed to their needs

Breathing

Screaming

Thawing

Melting

4. |kaleidoscope|

Through the dead window

The grey goose dirty pavement

Floats to the mottled sky

Moves to meet your love.

(I think of how fast you moved into me. And how suddenly out of me)

My hipbone is lower

Down than yours

It sits in your knee groove

And sometimes I like us to walk this way

Dragging you with me

Dragging me with us, our

Three- legged walk down

The soused empty streets.

And sometimes I don't.

Sometimes I can't. Today I can't imagine. And cannot. Like now.

Here, where you cannot find me.

Where you cannot birth for me, or see my dreams.

The subtle cavities inside of me, I can hide things from you.

Like in a quiver. Or swallow my screams in the lovefucked velvet
folds.

Here where I cannot find you. I can see you on the street.

I see you walking away from me. Or are you walking towards me?

When we pause and freeze, I cannot determine this.

And I tell you the tales, now, to remind you,

How oftentimes I am feeling all by myself.

And especially now.

(To remind you why I scream when you catch another girls' eye. It's because of now)

Now I am protoplasm. Now I am organic matter. Now I am a weighty ion for you all.

5. |petrification or condensation|

Spring is overused. I am overused. And you are overawed.

We are gnawed and wrapped and spat out and sucked in magnetic

Directions

My nerves are at me.

And I don't want a blue plastic tray.

I don't want to have to say to him,
To you; all the hefty cleave of me;

Go out; go out again to the outside.

Sneak your body out there

For me, if you slim yourself,

There are things I need

That you need to fetch for me, or him,

Maybe we just need to forage together

But you don't understand the word *forage* as I mime it

Beside the edge of the bed, my hands going

Like the clappers, and the TV's gone to snow and shadows.

And I never can accept *together* in this ward

This is my space, and I don't want it. Despite having it.

Space.

(The *I'm in his debt* space)

6. |st. vitus' dance|

If you could go out to the outside and find me some air, I would be most grateful. I would hate to make a nuisance of myself but I would be so thankful. Although *I'm in debt to you for giving me air to live* would be the worst kind of debt, Myself should let me out. To the air. I should drive myself. To wherever. I cannot believe the care is such that I'm better in here where I cannot make a rule. I cannot find my keys. And I know I need them for escape. A decision. A cup-of-tea. My womb. This room is a cell. I am made of cells. My eyes. My finger tips. My shinbone. This womb makes madness of the rest of us. And the test of us is to just go get to the outside and breathe the air. And be without a care of everyone or anyone. This brouhaha womb. This woman womb. This honey fungus hole.

You'll fit out through, I promise you. Here, take these tips:

First:

The narrow wooden knots in the door,
Push them through, push. Push.
Push down and they will fall out on.
Push hard down on the door's pine knots,
And we'll be finished here, or there.
Either way I am relieved when it ends.

Second:

You can bring the outside in
I miss the outside but you'll have
To go grab it for me, quick,
Kiss it hard and hold it inside your belly
Quickening. A pennyweight.
Of air. Whoosh. Quick. Quickening.

Third:

Blow the green bright mossy outside into me. See. Simple.

Me. Here. Here I am. Me. Me. Here see. See me. Here. Here I am. Me.

Bring me the outside and a dropeen of wind, and I can
Move, and the wind will move inside of me, and I will find the middle, it will force
Into me, it calms my gimcrack nerves.

Some times. Sometimes it calms me. Other times it frays me. Othertimes.

Listen to me, ssshhh, get the outside and blow
It back to me. Hurry.

7. |petrified|hardening|permanent|

Ssshhh, you shouldn't say that
Ssshhh, try get some sleep

If you leave your head back on the pillow
And shut down your eyes.

You're too erratic

You're nervous

You're too anxious

You're ectoplasm/desperate

You're too cautious

You're so suspicious

You're too chatty, weighted/loaded/charged,

You're

so

giddy

You're too unclear

You're near

You're rushed

You're so slow

You're fucking needy

You're too demanding

You're **so** super

You're quiet, why so quiet?

You're all hysteria

You should just ssshhh

And shut the creased frost violet lids,

Your young tired eyes - you might sleep

My love and ssshhh - maybe you can't say that, I shouldn't

Have said it, I know,

I know that now, but they didn't tell me.

They never told me.

8. |sucking numb|

They didn't tell me to pack it in the bag.

I know shouldn't have

But I have all the pamphlets here

Look, nothing about it at all;

D and C, if your child needs to be ventilated

what to pack for the labour ward,

signs of meningitis

*how fucked you are, how happy you are, how to get the paper cup
from the coffee machine. where to order quinoa. where to have a ciggie
signs of dilation. Reducing piles. Sit*

on an inflatable ring. Clean hands save lives.

See? Nothing about me. See? or how to get the air back inside? Me.

Ssshhh

Or you and me

But I'll stop now. I'll stop now.

Sorry. I should stop now. Sorry. I am sorry you know.

Did the bottom of my back just snap?

Would you mind awfully checking it for me?

I'm like a hawthorn stick, I am, see I'm brittle like this.

Ssshhh, maybe if we could say it

In another way, maybe it's the words

They can't hear, is the air blowing

On your face yet, from the outside,

Did you catch it for me, to breathe it?

Through my body, you'll need more, you need to

Suck it down into here, here, here, where it

Stretches out your hipbones darling.

Nonononono I can't feel it

Spray it on me, or move it to me,

Ssshhh, maybe if we're silent

9. |kick up a dust|

I had never met him before,

I can't see your face mother, bring it
To me, bring it over to me,

I could put this crinkled cherry band to your
Hair and it will pull the wisps of your strain
Back into to the crown of you.

*I could tell you how he fucked me.
How I fucked him. How I liked it.
How he smiled. I think he liked it too.
But I won't tell you mother.
I have no better word than 'fucking'.
So I'll ssshhh. And how it was a cock.
And I am a hen in this den to crew.*

I remember when you were born. Here on the tiled rubber.
Right here. Right by where you are now.

Were you happy mother?

Yes. A little then. Not so now darling, and it's all ahead of you my darling.
Ssshhh. You have to stop. You have to stop screaming. You have to stop Asking.
There is only one way to get air in and get air out.
No mother, there are more ways. There are always more ways.

They won't like you if you keep up your fuss.

You're very pale like a bad duck egg darling. Do you like duck eggs?

10. |enflame|

There's a ring of sinewy stuff stuck in the middle of me
Twisted tight, like rock, they're going
To take a hairy skin hammer to it and open the middle
Of me. No. they haven't asked me. It's not mine.
I shouldn't have said that. They're only trying to help get
Into the middle of me and give me
Something, a ball of heather, a ball of heat, a ball of sunrise
The ball moon, ping-pong of the rain,
The ball of middleme.

11. |compliance|

Ssshhh. I'm sorrysorrysorrysorrysorrysorrysorry. I would have drawn a map on vellum; I should have drawn a star. I could have put me on a bar graph or an app or something, and I would have let you find me, the middle of me, quicker, I see now how much I'm slowing down your day, holding up your trolleys and beds and catheters and toast for other mother makers I could have jotted down coordinates and put them in some new soft wear. But I was doing the laundry and making bread. I'm sorry. I loved him, the very essence of his eye. I never found the middle of him, they never showed me how. It wasn't there; it wasn't fair that I never did it for him. I will hurry up. If I got up and walking, but I've a hose in my back. Ok if I stopped talking. I've said I'm sorry. I'm like the echo of the hills. I'm like the sorry of the cliffs, I mean the caves. My words are stumbled.

Have you found the middle of me? Of any of us?

This is the twilight hour
Everyone dies at this hour

Nononononon he's fine, he's alive

It's just devoid of energy, this hour.

Listen, he's clawing up through you, you know, or down

Which way do you look at it?

Backwards.

Like looking at the enamel casing of a looking glass

I had a looking glass once, in the shape of a teardrop,

I have never seen a fully formed teardrop.

Do you not make them? In your eyes?

No, I do, I make lots of them

I just never catch them fully formed

They're like melting snowflakes.

I fear I have cracked it when I got up too fast,

In a too fast motion, the looking glass.

I did, I definitely did, and I cracked the casing

And I chastised myself. For I was

Always breaking things, the wooden legs of our heron

And that glass bottle that had the boat in,

Smashed that too, accidental and your *Wispa* Easter

Egg

Mug,

I would have packed it for you my love,

The boat? No. The looking glass.

Even with the crack? Because of the crack.

Am I cracked? Not yet darling. You've a few hours left.

Were you happy looking into the looking glass?

Well not with the crack in it

Was it cracked on the enamel part?

Yes darling. But surely it wouldn't

Affect your reflection? Everything affects your reflection.

12|honey sac|

The light reflects the flats sprawl in the Liffey

The sun reflects my child's hair, dyed blood colour red

The moon reflects our shiny oiled chimneybreast

The stars reflect the ebony dashboard, with my feet elevated

The Christmas lights reflect your chestnut eyes, but only in my head

The looking glass will reflect your demise

13|ice cubes for the ferry trip and purgatory|

I wonder how many party bags of ice it would take?

For what?

To keep her body frozen on the back seat of our car.

To keep her frozen in your beating stone heart.

To not ever again reflect the stars

Never

No never. To never again reflect the lights on the riverbed

My dead child.

Never, no no never.

2. 2 what?

2 bags.

2 bags of what?

2 bags of ice to keep it ever never again
reflect off our marble bleating hearts.

14| gentlemen's agreement over boucle coat|

I reached my leg over. Feeling the dark. The railings. Of the River Liffey. It was dark. Dead dark time. Deathly dark time. I put my second leg over. I was wearing a skirt. The frost sprayed pole shocked me. I am here. I am there. I am never inside my own head. I stepped inside the railing. Two men passed in Boucle coats. They said are you ok Hun? No. I said. Can we call anyone for you? Yes. I said. Yes. Have you a number. No. I said. Have you. No. They said. Would you like our coat? Does it fit two? I said. His does. They said, mocking our new friend. It's very cold love. The railing. I know. I'm riding it this way. I'm frozen. I said. I am riding it straddle. Not sidesaddle. If I sidesaddle this way I slip, I slip in. I am like her in the bed of flowers after her mad lover who had feigned mad. Went mad and killed her. He didn't kill her but really he did kill her. You can't go mad and not warn someone. It's an unfair thing to do. Do you think he killed her? They both said, nodding down their heads, like stables horses might. The Prince? Oh yes. Yes, he killed her. All mad men kill what they love. Often by their killer sulks. Especially by their sulks and their moods. Not in this Boucle coat, mind. Especially if you're younger than them. If you would only sit in this way, keep your feet in here Hun. The heart is leaping outta me watching you straddle that pole. In where? In here. On Dublin. Keep my feet in on Dublin and my legs together sidesaddle? And you've done nothing more than leave me in a Boucle coat, warm to survive, but not heated enough for us to live. Only to survive. But be in fools. You are not a fool. You do. You do. And it will be ok. He survived. You will too. He took a very small fall. I will wake up and I will have this inside my

belly. And I can't even find it. I should stop laughing. But I can't even find it. See. It's not here. Or there. Or anywhere. I can't point it to you with this index finger. I am blind. There are more ways to be blind than gouging out the eyes. Imagine cutting off the feet. You could. Are you still cold? No. No. Saddle in this way and slip back here. And you can keep the coat. I can. Thank you. Are you ok now? Can you remember the number? Yeah. Ok, let us dial it for you Hun. Call someone to help you. Yes ok. Ok. The Number? 2. 2? Yes two. I am walking away now. I don't know how else to say it. 2 and me away from you and your kindness. Riddle me this though men of gentle night. How many bottles of gin and herbs would it take now? Would it take for what? A naggin? A shoulder? A baby? A litre? So what volume would it take to divide 2? Divide it in half? No. No, in fact to divide it by 10. Why ten? Because it's not really 2 is it? Not really. A bud it not half a tree if the tree dies is it? A chick is not half her mother on a plate roasted is she? A virus can't sustain without the host it kills, a cocoon is only as alive as the butterfly but half and half a cocoon does not make a butterfly winged, my eyes cannot see underwater, my legs cannot run without me. Minus 1 has no potential, has it? Well, yes with a positive. Otherwise, no. I suppose not. But I am not a Siamese twin. (Oh awful position, where no one will win) A baby kangaroo in its pouch is not half her mother. The wolf spider's egg sac will be carried by the mother but is not half of her. Ah that's it. Touch the Dublin soil under your feet. Don't mind talking of spiders. Have you drink taken? Or drugs? Lots around here still sniffin' the poppers. Without their coats on. Is the coat warm? It's lovely. Thanks. Mind yourself Hun. Yes boy. Men. I am a woman. And I will try to mind myself on Dublin soil. This is concrete. Yes, but under it. Think under it, crack it up and destroy it and think of the fertile soil and the earthworms under it. Gouge up the concrete. And then I will see. No. Sadly no. Unless you run the earth through your fingers. But these are weak fingers. They can't fight off anything.

They can sow. And so, they are not weak fingers.

And you are warm so you are not weak.

15|Baksheesh|

You must make sure that they are empty and that they know their crime and that you give them a scrubbing brush. You must remember the children must not be marked. No one will buy them. Keep the girls alive. Without exerting too much energy. I have a photographer, he is coming later to take pictures, we are thinking of making a brochure of them. A well educated man, the photographer.

What do you want me for, what do you want with me, do you want anything? I will freeze, if you expect anything from me. I am only part of a sequence. I am a Silver Cross pram. I am walking down the street in Athenry. I see my first burkka. I am walking and walking
I am carrying the dead weight in my legs. It haunts my walk.

I am remembering the teenage boys on the train to Heuston telling me how Molly loved when one of them would hold one of her tits, and the other would hold the other tit and how oh how she said she loved. It. She loved. It. I asked them did they ask her, Molly, about what her tits loved, but they said they didn't need to ask her, They knew what Molly liked.

I am a cemetery slab. I am a pine tree. I am a fourteen-year-old unmet dream. I am the wooden owl carver. I am my dead brother's tiny boot. I am a footstep. I am the truck man who hides behind the gate. I am the alter polisher. I am the local doctor. I am scared of the dark. I am the evening lark. I am the cemetery goat. I am choked. I am cold. I am my sister's first host. I am in America. I am always looking for my mother. I am a snooker player. I am gay. I am the eternal day and I am not ok. I am hungry. I am a radio wave. I am tested and depraved. I am my father's wish. I am my mother's dead womb. I am never giving in. I am the identification process. I am the train ticket checker. I am the taxi driver. I am the cot maker. I am the blanket baby knitter. I am the fruit seller. I am the teacher. I am the orchard stealer. I am the dead. I am the child's eyelash flutterer. I am the pissing seven-year-old-stutterer. I am a crown of thorns. I am the goat horn. I am the cook. I am a milkman. I am the van driver. I am a carpenter. I am a fort, a promontory fort.

I am this man's soft navy jumper, riding his steely chest; I would lie up against it, like the mantel of a cliff, and beg him to save us.

I am not beyond begging for my sister. Or my daughter. Or your mother.

I am in my dead Granny's kitchen and she is sweating. She is making scones. She makes a special Gingerbread man for my brother. I give him a bow tie with raisins. It doesn't look too good. Later he flicks off the raisins and chomps down the thing. He never offers me a bite, and I don't like that he has eaten him. It's my secret.

Women need to keep secret.

Ssshhh they tell us all the time.

Sorry we tell them all the time.

We are always face to face with the men who would sell the world out from under us.

I was always face to face with the men who would sell me.

The world out from under us.

They are a whole alphabet of gestures.

They are a whole language of figurative translation.

Here/There is a pain of woman.

Here/There is a pain of man.

15| gavel-kind|

You're twelve. You have small dark hands and narrow almond hips. You are useful to your father. And your uncle. You are not sick.

You're forty-two tomorrow. You have lumps all over your chest. But your husband is busy. You have a high risk of deep-sea swimming to the rock deep bottom today. You are not sick.

You are spread eagled on the green of the college in March. It was Paddy's day. They took advantage of the day. And afterwards they stole your red clutch bag with the flick clip. They didn't take advantage of you. You were non advantageous. You are not sick. You are a sign of suffering.

And how bountiful how bountiful how bountiful you are. Not sick.

You are mothering you are feeding, lactating.

You are spreading, don't scream for yourself, now.

How selfish?

Don't feed yourself now.

And that mask over your head, for you to breathe first before you put one on your child?

You know that's a head fuck, don't you?

They will judge you in the algae of the Atlantic when your child drowns you know, and it will all be your fault.

Always.

You are bated,

Oh how bated, how bated how bated you all look, suffering.

16|tom tidler's ground, who owns a dead woman?|

Last lesson. How to put cake makeup on a dying corpse. Last Lesson.

First you wet the sponge under the running tap water, you really need Prolong Foundation Wear, and lots of dry powder as the body stays sweating long after the brain is dead.

You may hear gas noises.

The baby will not coo inside, but it's ok, we'll all hear it coo afterwards.

And what should we do with mum?

(This is mum here)

With the cherry-cola-lip-stain and the twenty-four hour make up cake on her face.

Oh mum. Poor mum is dead. So to the morgue. Yes. To the morgue.

And what a darling what a darling what a darling she looks.