

DONNA KEMP

14. WRITING BACK TO LIFE

COMING ...

... from nobody
into nobody
nobody that's me.

LABEL (I)

Jacket
Strait

LABEL (II)

Peel back the
many layers
others have,
in their ignorance,
given you.
Revealing your core,
the only label
needed here—
love.

LABELS (III)

Love hath no labels
labels hath no love.

AUTUMN DRIVE

I drove to autumn.
Plucked myself. Later,
dressed in a new down,
I eased my way
into the world again.

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THE TUTOR

Come
Control
Query
How me
little girl
married you.
Relied upon
instead of self.
Recall I do
early days
wedded bliss.
You and me
disagree.
You walking
away.
Gone.
I soon
learned
not to
speak my
mind.
Till now.

WHEEL WAGON

Hot the day I stood on
kerbside and, in mum-made
comfy blue cotton,
tried to ease the strain of
wheel changing our red wagon.
You afraid of being late.
Nuts and bolts replaced.
Wagon wheeled once more
onward to reconciliation.
Returning home—a bearded friend
the Godfather was
courted on the radio.
You still you.
Controlling grew.
Stamped on us
forever.

LOVE /ANCHOR

Anchor
weighed
down my heart.
Where the scene
was no one knew.
I can't even believe
I married you.
Been looking for
twenty years.
Always been a
poet.
Why did I hide?
Because of fear.
Smirk no more.

SPARK

Spark
the light that is your
freedom, let it glow within,
allow life's love of laughter,
be a simple gift.

GRIEF

It is here then the memory of you!
Captured, ensnared, I sit on the edge of all
our moments and despair of what has been
gone without your mama. Moving into your world,
I touch {the cold bites hard notes of welcome on a washing line}
your soft hair, look into your astonished eyes,
capitulate into your infancy ...
Generations of grief are no matter to this world,
they are the mere tears of girls and women.

SITUATE A SELF

I am not to find it in these books.
I am not to find it here.
Knock, knock, knock—coming in—
the world of my previous generations.
Who are they? Do they watch over me now?
Am I just another in this line of what?
Destructive lives?

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I cannot change that which has been.
I cannot live in tomorrow and
I am denied a present.
Where am I as woman to be?

UNTITLED

In the darkness alone,
I danced with my distress.

UNTITLED

I sit in the peace of my heart
and knock at the wall of my sadness.

SEPARATED FROM SELF

Self rested on the shelf
that was not dusted.
Outside the raging yellow rags
waged war with all that laid still.
Hid in-between the nurturing breast
laid bare to feed that which was of me?
And, in the scouring days that followed,
each yellow rag turned black, until
the moment when the cold steel of
the surgeon's knife took the future
generations away. It was not him.
No more the yellow rags turned black.
It was the un-dusted shelf that rose
on the tick of my scream and gave
my Self to me.

UNTITLED

She lies, as liars do,
in her hospital bed.
About her is a cluck of offspring,
pulled in on the long lead of,
"Is she dying?"
For a moment, we are together,
and, in the hope/less wind of
now, we love and laugh.

CONFUSION

Sports day and the T Shirt is too big
the boy small.

He sits on the edge of my heart.
He stumbles and falls in the sack,
the rope is twisted at his shoes,
he rips to first place at last.
It is over, the final lap to be done,
he is on the edge of the world
no honour lies here. His pain
will nudge him to meet his yesterday's
and make sweet his tomorrow/s?

Sports day and the T Shirt is too big
the boy small.

I WANT NEVER GETS?

You gave me a name—'Dona,'
spelt 'd,' 'o,' 'n,' 'a.'
Told me it meant "Lady in Spanish."
I tried. Scores of public muddles ensued.
An aeon passed. When it came, at my request;
"But, it has 'Donna' on the certificate!"
"That was your dad. He went to register you."
I muddled up and in.
I wanted to be.
"I want never gets" you said,
over and over and over.
Sometimes, sometimes I do.
Did you?

UNTITLED

If woman is to be free
then she must be empowered
to Be.

L/ONLY WARD VISITING?

Oh, here you are at last!
I have waited long for this?
On the stretched white of the pillow
lies your aged head.

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Through the curling mists of grey,
stained with nicotine yellow,
lies the baby pink of your scalp.
Are my fingers to meet it? As once
they did in childhood? No. Not here. Not now.

You have moved from sleep, and, your eyes,
once hollows to mine, possess a winter night
sky, lit only by a waning crescent moon, the twinkle
of any star long since faded here. As always,
these eyes betray your words. Now I can forgive
you immediately—it is easier that way.

You take me in with laboured breath.
I travel the crevices of a most
dry desert, the surface of which is
relieved only by your disappearing mouth,
a bruised purple oasis of spittle and smile.
And, of course, down the generations of women
we meet, becoming one, in a moment of
grief and joy.

THE BODY PARLOUR

Transient finally dressed in a one-off purple!
Her hand in mine, cool as the surface of
a glacial winter daybreak.
The translucent flesh of her face
complements the sole plum garb,
all yellowing and scattered with {exhausted stars}
black holes ...
I am left aside and alone.
I crumble amongst a chase for words.
“We meet on the edge of the female line?”
I ask her to watch over me ...
“It is my turn now ...?” (!...)
I cannot say I am pleased she is
gone. I stoop to kiss her ripe
forehead, it is easy, she cannot
refuse or turn. I am the loving
daughter I want to be and she,
my mother.

BELONGING TO THE DECEASED

We are sorting out
life, bits of this and
that—Mother's life gone
now—all sold up.

BOUNCING TO DEATH

Early morning
with siblings on
the bed ...
She has 'GOOD news ...'
'Jump,' they said, she said,
'Jump' (fake joy), 'He's gone,'
'We are better off without him' (you).
It's true! Yet, still, my heart
is oozing the flush of red,
the love I felt for you ...
Daddy, Daddy, Daddy
Daddy, Daddy, Daddy
I am missing you.

FRUITS OF WINTER

I can recall the shock
you are found and you
are dead.

THE SHOE BOX / FAMILY RECORDS

Here, let's put it here
in this shoe box,
let's tidy up my life
store it in a cupboard
under the stairs. From here
it will be easy to open its rhythm,
pick at its thread—till all is laid bare.

UNTITLED

I am sorting once again
looking for her. I want
to lay her to rest,
take her properly to her
deathbed through knowing.

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AGENCIES OF BENEFIT / LETTER TO THE BENEFIT AGENCY

Please can you—will you
I hope
Please can you—will you
I hope
Bring benefit to me and mine

Please can you—will you
I hope
Please can you—will you
I hope
Bring the benefit of clarity to my heart

Please can you—will you
I hope
Please can you—will you
I hope
Crunch numbers into sense

Please can you—will you
I hope
Please can you—will you
I hope
Agencies of benefit the cashless kind

Please can you—will you
I hope
Please can you—will you
I hope
Move swiftly for I need to know.

(On writing to the Benefits Agency trying to find any record of my mother's roots)

FILLED WITH GAPS

She/I/We
She, I, we are filled with gaps—
We live a gap together—
I am a gap living in a
life gap, filled with gaps.

UNTITLED

Lifting off the skin
skin is lifting off

lifting off my skin
my skin is lifting off
Sun—is not—
the day.
Lifting off the skin
skin is lifting off
Lifting off my skin
my skin is lifting off.

SURE SHOCK

Sure, you are 'dead'
I am hearing him say.
Like lightning, I shunt
three spaces, across
the proud terracotta sofa,
away from him and toward my lover,
"Fuck, fuck, fuck," my 'lady-like' retort
"How much do our children have to bear?"

I am moving,
turning away from the
black and violating, truly
crushing embrace of
his words. Heart. Last night.
Cruel irony slaps repeatedly at my synapses.
He, himself, had saved so many hearts.
There were thank you cards
sometimes on the mantle.

For our children I set off toward
the strangulation that would
become both death to our
life and breathe existence anew
into each cell—of the hell of you.

UNTITLED

Life is turned
on its side
meaning is lost
lost in meaning
life has turned

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on its side
in death.

A WONDERFUL LIFE

And so he has died!
I am told a red breast
was the bringer of his death!!!
I cast a glance, a flight
of the eye, across the twinned
worlds in which I live, external
and internal slabs of shock
wait, like the 'ladies' they
have been taught to be, to
weep, for our children, for him,
for me. And so it is
that death accompanies life,
a wonderful life.

MYSELF

Fragile
in this possibility
of love
of light.

DRESSED

... she came to me
in a cloak of lies,
of darkness that
betrayed my light ...
... decaying ... her skin
gone to bones
mattered into the
murmured beat of
my lived heart.
Undoing her
turns my breath
into scars of gasps,
pushed through flesh
undressed
in becoming whole.

HER EYES OPENED WIDE

Bleached
stark white
shock from
the inside
out. Her
abandonment
was riper,
more pungent
in its stench,
of a mother's
betrayal than
I had been
asked to imagine ...
previous understanding
now lost to horror ...
the horror of
my mother!

NO SEX WORK ON THE STREETS...

Sunday morning ...
I had been waiting
for a first call ... from one
of four newly discovered
siblings

... pulsating into my ear drum
with a strange and familiar
'Corrie' accent '... She was not a sex worker you know,
if that's what you're thinking ...'
I HAD BEEN
my Being is ruptured

She was homeless,
imprisoned twice,
for actual ...
... abandonment

... pulsating into my ear drum
with a strange and familiar
'Corrie' accent
'she was not a sex worker you know
if that's what you're thinking ...'
I HAD BEEN

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my Being is ruptured

here's to the foundlings of my mother.

SPECIAL TREASURE

Not gold.
Not silver.
Not precious stones.
Nor any man made chattel.
I am, have found,
the rare riches
of my Soul.

RELATIVELY CLOSE HATRED

Hatred
is taboo.
Let's talk of love
not hate.
Yet of late
I know that this
is true, hatred
exists within me,
for each and both
of you.

UNTITLED

What is a body ?
a holding frame
for spirit.

SILENCE

In the silence
between the feral
noise of being
children ... came a
moment of terror ...
before the full throttle
of her anger laid
cruelty across
my soul ... unfree
am I from this yet ...?

Almost, nearly there.

GORGEOUS GIRLS

Discovered in me
opposite sisters
'S'cuse me'
and Grey.

LIGHT

Light flickers across
the wall, a melody
of movement,
of God dancing.

RETURNING TO GOD

... is a lesson
of life ... all
other lessons lead
to this ...

LILLY HALL LANE

I turned into Lilly Hall Lane
looking for a place to sob,
to listen to my pain.

A voice talking suicide, isolated, ugly,
fearful and angry buried deep and
available, no where to be with myself
for me ... shame, shame, shame.

I turned into Lilly Hall Lane
looking for a place to sob,
to listen to my pain.

UNTITLED

I am one with
space and substance.

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UNTITLED

of course
in essence
spirit is the
bespoke seamstress
the tailor of our
lives.

UNTITLED

Nowhere is
more perfect
than now.

UNTITLED

the glory of spirit
always visits
in solitude.

UNTITLED

My mind
reflects on
poetry...is
this who
I am before
a God felt
in all that is?

UNTITLED

I learn to avoid
the hitting by being
dead.

UNTITLED

I tried today
to listen for
God ... in my
Work ... but
no, I could not
hear love today,
not today.

A KEY...

... a button,
a potential of
an opening, I
queried in the
air, but no,
today no God
was there.

UNMASKING

Unmasking my
mother ...
... unmasked
am I?

IN MEMORY OF SAM

I am the office Angel.
A temp, on Welcome Duty,
being told you have died!
Self - slay they say.

To boot, yesterday,
I bore witness to your anger, your pain, your voice ...
'Is Roger there?'
'Yes, I'll call him.'
Dialling from my desk ...
A moment, barely discernable,
of hesitant exchange ... (your rage?).
'It is Sam isn't it?'
'Yes.'

I remembered your name.
From time to time I didn't
and that bothered.
Later, I hear your
raised voice.
Then you chitchat
with staff about
your beloved dog.
I saw you leave.
I was on the stair.
That's all I knew of You.
Still, in my memory, Sam lives.

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SUDDENLY AND UNEXPECTED

I am told he has gone—dead.
I am telling him; still a boy, his dad is dead.
In a tackle of telephone calls, we craft a journey.
I see her first through the foyer glass.
In unrehearsed cold-blood, I have just practised on a friend
who is aghast and I am ready ...
Eye contact ... she knows now something is amiss ...
ten or twelve steps to go ... Staring through the pane,
we walk parallel and toward each other.
I am seated with her ... she collapses like an
imploding and imploring flower, rises from
me and leaves before I can catch her in grief.
A moment or two later she is returned.
She has locked the crumple in a box somewhere just for her.
I want to scream. Travelling home, in turn, we shed tears,
and mutter pragmatic nuances, and there is still the family, his, long since viciously
split, to be faced.

SITTING WITH THE HUM OF A DISHWASHER

I sit with my pen and
the hum of the dishwasher,
a beauty in the
rhythm of its beat causes
a click toward life and
its mystery.

I sit with the hum of the
dishwasher and be.

Being here connected
to the star lights, the
spiritual realm of the
body ... my dishwasher
and me.

I sit with the hum of the
dishwasher and be.

LOCKED IN DISTRESS

Locked in distress.
I am, I was I is
a dress of crawling

skin makes me
up Outside of
this is I nothing?

UNTITLED

was going out to lunch ...
instead, I am out to lunch
floating away on the edge of
own skin ...
how can this be healed
haunting me ... now.

IN THE BROWN OF HER SKIN

In the brown of her skin
lies the laughter of
my yesterday and tomorrow.
In the sand covering her body
I am reminded of the
freedom of rolling in a
moment of childhood,
which fleshes to marry
the blue of the sky
and ocean.

STAFF

Pools of love
given as gifts
to the work
of the day.

LAYERS OF LEARNING

From the mouths
of orators, here
we go ... ontology ...
epistemology ...
methodology ...
methods ...
ingredients of
meaning making structures,
all extrinsic to the born of
our intrinsic worlds,

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layers of learning,
bums on seats,
it's just a research (greedy reductionist?¹)
paper?

GREY

Grey is the pallor of
her skin, her being.
Here her existence is
created, is fear.
Fear and safety
are one. This is
all she knows.

UNTITLED

Coming into the light
the grey that hangs
on your skin, let
us begin, it's not
yours I am sure
it's not yours—from
what you told me before.
The grey of your skin
is his ... do you think?

GRASPING

When I k (no) w my
mother was treated
brutally too can I
in a (under) standing voice,
write of my pain
to yours, how can a
woman (middle aged) in
years tell of the
ache, lies, secrets,
rewritings of (Her/Our) story?
Abuse, violence, erasure
through the sheets, wet,
beside the scorch of
a lemonade hot water
bottle—how can I tell
I matter ... she did too ...

ALWAYS

Always like a pending
Halloween night this trace
of a brutal killing voice,
that stirs in my body,
in my torso, across the
flesh that holds my bones
and innards, speaks ...
shut the fuck up, you
have nothing to say,
you have nothing anyone
wants to hear, you
are going to die
ordinary anyway
shut up and clean
that's a real woman's
way.

TURNING WITH AND AGAINST

My body turned
in her polite query
my body turned.

My body turned from a
mere place in which
I reside to the cold
heat of hell, burning
with fear, flooded with
the chill of shame ...
all on the back of, against,
a grievance?

My body turned
in her polite query
my body turned

As always, I kept it still

GENERAL CONCRETE CONVENTIONS IN WESTERN POETRY...

not poetic
poem, right.
a Your

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not writing
It's is
just your
pain. No-one
else will
be
interested—
they
said

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NOTES

¹ Dennett, D. (1995). *Darwin's dangerous idea*. London: Simon & Schuster.

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