

A maõ aberta
(The Open Hand)

Kathleen March

and only horizontal definitions
forgotten or never really started never written

That was interruption, they said

A pillow needs washing now for that bed to fit
reproach of air in disuse I see
that last recipe is here and another in tight rows
force-fed from more countries than you
needed or perhaps knew

The walls are darker than when we left, you one day I the next
looking unevenly with stark eyes for two months of time
two that could have been here and with more
time suctioned off from dissonant places
but not from minutes that now breathe at random, so slowly
time swallowed but here we rip back our fingers
can see thin folded pajamas and understand, see a ragged edge
a piece of tissue paper that somebody saved, and now
in an awkward place beneath your chair, torn and apart

There is probably more space here than
I should remember
a cold absence of footprints sketches
screens showers coast and those Irish pubs
and what we thought we did, in your charcoal

So now bits and pieces of house

begin to dissolve: their ribs and poppies, breathing
phantoms masquerading as lost scents, raising hands
crushing the silent fields beneath them
in gesture of gentle detention
to accept the accusation and the closing, or close, door
that opens its desire

2.

The scream

The terror of leaving you is no greater
than the terror of coming home
and finding only your crumpled
clothes in your room
your space showing off your miniscule tattoo and toe ring
your thoughts on how to despise me
not able to leave
like I did, not wanting to go
and still going

but first you tried on
a skin you knew found it fit your walking
but not the boxes hidden
among skirts or spite, disappointment

The engraving with the *palloza* hangs by the bed where the skin laid
has not been held in place by a nail with no meaning
but then you never saw it

it was my room but you slept there, forced
to look through our terror the one you knew
watching the bed and wondering how thought ends

3.

Reflect

Whine of bright bird punctuates the sun and pierces grass
in the backyard

The bedroom just out of reach is a garden of remnants that document
your absence, your portrait

I do not know today if you were ever here or
there were words in doubtful arrangements and they confuse me
before leaving

You left traces of paint in places never mentioned and where
often it is not found, or rarely
and black, you liked black
far too much, it outlined your sketch pad, postcards
some faded, others the same
your needs, your misses, a false anger that crawled into four corners
curled up with a purr, waited and slept

A room in this house is full of air now, disheveled
like you, bent by sad flight
a part of it fleeing to the coast any coast
coast that is one of three

away from the cold view of the mountain
never here where something is buried in a box
and only speaks in error
and only speaks

The birch tree at your window
nods carefully and knows you left one night it was two weeks
ago or two years or today
and do not know how nor where to remember me

Keeper of cats standing, ushering in the night
missing you, building something or just
this small house
where you might have been
with faded postcards
and a black that is spreading still

4.

You forgot something you never knew you had

The geranium is next to the ivy
the small oak stand with carved legs and door and slash of paint
is beside the window
its single drawer drowned by a sun whose chickens
drink white clouds with pleasure, in a cage

They cackle and forget

I am here, waiting for the yellow rose
to wilt so the memory of its giver
will leave me, and
like an ant, I
can cross the carpet, find
the waiting poison, and
fade

5.

Lesson on gardening

The purring of birches replaces
the glimmer of the unhappy girl
who moved here planning to grow
she grew sad, missed the earth
she needed, stored in flowerpots
no roots, no fragile water, an orange clay
punished only by gloveless hands and a missing name
hands abandoned her, and the garden that only had three rows
an uncertain number of pebbles
a warm shadow watered by that face

Yet white pages marked with black scraggling branches
could always cover it: a thing that limped, dragging
weapons and defense

6.

If I knew how to count

You have measured me, and if you can
if only with slight and skewed calculation
use eye and shoulder to gauge the darkness
you have walked through and your discontinuity
it has always terminated
with the kind of hard thread
and screech that you discovered along
 the paths, dimmed by the lost kind of fire

Count the days and the departures
let me if possible recall the returns
and say they were for a reason
and think there will still be one

Numbers have many small thorns
You walk over them, one by one,
 and away
 no farther than that

You rustle, a leaf falls out with long spirals
a color spills its scent of basil
a page opens slowly on a bed where

nobody has slept for days
where nobody sleeps

The letters between us are tied
in sienna gold and weightless
they enter my tomb begging to be read
knowing nothing else counts

7.

Tact

You cannot catch cellophane
crisp air, it slips from fingers
and palm, a border nips the clenched shape that resembles
a feathered hand
and reminds you of memories and an origin

You persist, because transparency possessed
could mean you hold something that trades definition for horror,
cluttered, a thing with an edge keener than this diffuse and
distant present, framed only by the rectangle you see
but will not touch
or only by the urn of bright geraniums you stole
from your mother
the ones you
 ignore
 as if they were plastic

8.

Heritage

Old places had used things stored in far corners in far places

some were blank with rust and heavy with distance

Ones still unused have come here, wretched

resurrected and musty

waiting for you to put an end to

what moved beneath the surface

Only words can save Mary Magdalene

soft sinner set aside

crucified gently so you would suffer because

she cannot say why or

cannot remember

why unopened faces in gold locket and half-used cupboards

still despise her

She has sifted through the finely ground dust of the broad steppe

wrapped us one by one and slowly

in blue sand and fed her hands with

the blind white cold of scaly birches, often

Morgan unbound, liver consumed,

she was the one who watched and rocked over the newborn cradle,

she had to curse in her grandmother's tongue

she always knew her future and then she was misplacing
her true target then
and probably still

She must have known she was born
to kill that one now

9.

Carnet de voyage

There is creak of bird here
flash of nasturtiums
and your jade fragments etch sea tigers

Bent beside these walls, I am putting them back together
washing hair and skin and feet
before all is lost and has gone
this is done very carefully and for oonce without syllables

Mummified, staring at this still
shapeless body, you speak small sparks
if this is a laugh it shatters and there are
no windows
no crease in the white cloth
only moving damp earth

You wear black only for me and it is entirely upright
like the backs of many books like walls
and this dusk
that coats my parched fingers

You are but an emerald oasis now
or if this is an error,

a small, darting mirage
the minnow I hooked through the mouth
to catch a fish with a fish

I wish I'd never touched water
or never touched that river

10.

Looking back

For some reason you always thought backwards
where there were trees or a Siberian iris in the back yard
Things rode by on horseback, hooves pounding too hard too often
The house was to blame
 cool copper minutes
 cypress candles
 walls with night sweats
 tiles that should have been
 from Portugal

And the sea also between the shoes with polished glass
 showing that coins are useless
 and lost
 when forms walk over water and do not sink

What is it that severs the eye

You thought the pine trees were a game
posts in the handrail to help you go and return
Tiny, there, you made the foundations tremble when
the knife in the lower drawer flashed when
even a raccoon wandered in confused
and a tiny beast became earth but nothing grew

it was a corpse after all

One day it all froze over and it was not hell but it
was no longer a house or cats
the garden stood entirely silent
the loosestrife only embroidery

You turned your beautiful head and planted
a last row of postcards in new snow with those eyes
snapped your fingers and: bridge

You walked
with no hands

11.

Words will

Words in another language so you will
not read them

Another place you will not go because
you do not care for places
you have visited before you were twelve
a time you do not know now nor will
a voice often mistaken for a bat's call from the hollow but
never the one at the bottom of the lake
the one cats play with
the voice that is lost when a toy is broken
 not yours
 it is not yours now

Postcards of places and voices left in the sun to dry

One goes here and another to another
one take away one and it splinters
subtraction may need documentation or some distinct proof
if we want to know it well and slaughter or survive
each word is a tiny postcard
now not sent to you, hidden at the back
of a bookcase, for a reader who
will not be you nor know you

will not think of you nor
find you
not now, at least, or not ever

It will be like you have
finally died
and these words will have
killed you while they drew the map and misfired

12.

REDRUM

One of the rooms in this house
is red it is all right
red walls warm a gravel path
I only touch them in the form
of a ghost

She never enters, not here she
is not here ever she
She does not see me and I am never
invisible now I am not

But I would drop a trail of crumbs
stretch a thread
place toys here

Or hold my breath among the magpies
never more and not a single word
if

It would bring her to me
at the scarlet edge
of Crete
learning taurokathapsia
in order
to survive

13.

A glance and darkness
insect in thick night air, edged by a
flash of fingers, then a
melted fear that spreads, when
somewhere glass shatters its sound it is

not here where there used to be water

Here there are stones made of flesh
and someone else is a mason
someone who did not dismantle
the wall with knuckles and nails
who knew where her wrist was growing
where her feet were and the mahogany railing

Someone else who looked, and never
had to wipe the blood away where she had been pricked
because a sharp rain had opened the door
and she'd stepped through to safety
taking the wrong keys rose keys they gave her
leaving twenty four stones, just leaving them

I have cut off my hand

14.

Story girl

There were the stories, however
one was a blue cloud kept in a box
 small, a considerable treasure
one a girl who only wore blue
one a woman who wrote worlds and sometimes broke them
 and one in particular
 she traveled
 so the girl could have them too

Those stories
and other stories, ashes and hollyhocks
 as I recall
those I never told you when the wind blew
but they are the places you
often paint
you will go there
when your eyes return
when I leave, only then, an envelope of thin time
when all that remains and comes of us
are these hands that even then
were starving

15.

Only on some occasions

There was that distance
only eyes understood, when they still read maps
of the land to the east
its absence surrounding a dot
on one of two convex coasts
carefully allotting an eye for each side; the third person was only
a continent but it was ours
with no stepping-stones that I know of
You walked the same path
walked it and
walked it
until the map that they drew was your lie
the land had slid westward
distance had dug a hole in the horizon like a glacier
and you were clutching
a withered, stiffened carnation
no longer red
a hatchet
a voice on the wire was all they let you have
measured in weeks or months
folded and put away
until December

16.

The worms

When you moved here
you had not yet gone to France
Amsterdam awaited you
 something you did not know
but you knew the crows
 black, raucous, like bats, eating the ground
you watched woodpeckers that
 pierced pine hearts every morning
 the ones that were not as hard
 but fed them
you came and went
breathed only music and wind and
threw them down the corner well to
hear them splash, then drown
you wrote your name on the floor
and hid hardened rose petals
 in your room
 where you kept
 miniature pigs from Ireland
 a lamp broken in secret
 other terrors
 a bed where
 you made love to someone
 the bed the only thing

I ever gave you
that made you happy

The bedroom door is now closed, but
could be
unlocked in case someone needs to enter
and I know that somewhere
you sleep on the floor
but you sleep

17.

Lesson

There are no books in this house you once said
shelves hold plans for them, still
halls murmur and know
there never was any bull here

Lachesis was another thing altogether:
favorite daughter of Nyx
shadow across your page
she never read to you, but lived
between three and ten they were her wrong numbers
and bound always to her uncertain loom
she never knew she was the illiterate
daughter of Khaos
until now

What you never knew
 you learned
 when you began to walk
 saw doors and windows
 were measured
 never believed the calculations

Because they were in the wrong language

18.

*A different portrait:
one lighter than air, but also true*

You were once lighter than air
the words were written and said you wore green
and you did and you are engraved
green arms and green legs
slender and flying
and already damaged
you ran toward the face
carnival broken
the air not true
one mask
became a two or more if I knew how to count
there were two flights
yours I knew well
mine was a monster behind
 our wall
hunkered down, hard
 in control of all it never battled
 and never fled in time

When I begged you for a mirror
it handed me this disguise
my name
your small green clothing

a rock that had to be thrown
with a watch that had no hands
no numbers and nothing more than
a wristbone, uneven and bruised

Everything that is red - or green - is now broken

19.

A Very Short Story

*Once, when I was young and true,
Someone left me sad –
Broke my brittle heart in two;
And that is very bad.*

*Love is for unlucky folk,
Love is but a curse.
Once there was a heart I broke;
And that, I think, is worse.*

Dorothy Parker

*Unha vez tiven un cravo
cravado no corazón,
i eu non me acordo xa se era aquel cravo
de ouro, de ferro ou de amor*

Rosalía de Castro

This song is for you and me
given that its melody is as brittle as those
earrings you made of old dried dead rose petals with the scent of
words learned wrong, played askew
the sad old siren stood on the pier
arms open
five nails in her belly

one had a name and vertigo

one sang, too

fixed in the mistake

of an empty red place

20.

The calls of three or four animals
braid the silken horizon, deceiving us into thinking
it can return
the dawn flicks its ashes
over something that has not
quite yet died

They are both leaving
the house goes meekly with them
the worn box that once was gold and blue
the dirty canvas where you painted
a keychain from Amsterdam
no keys that fit any doors you want to open
damp bed
damp pillow
an easel covered with clothing
empty drawers except for trinkets
shelves shivering in the fragile light
the Zen garden where in the dark and fear you placed
a miniature rake
a tiny pink seashell
the baby of a My Little Pony

I gave you that

I gave you that
that rake and the sand

that horizon bound and braided

with fear

all that remains

and neither of us wants to take

what you receive and absorb

There is no suitcase for that, only a road

21.

Na cerna do terror

un dardo de orgullo define a luz.

María Xosé Queizán

Tugging at the wall (not the door)

she wanted in

or out

a vertical flatness hung there but showed her no windows

the girl beat her head against

the paper on the wall

 a bird creaked yet again in the

 birch tree's sadness

 metal on wood

 bone on wood

She cawed

the crow flew at the angle

formed by the floor, its beak

 broken

She was unhappy

both birds might disappear

she covered her ears first

then threw the crow against the wall

to stop the pain

22.

*Like faces who haunt my night,
Ghost faces of my follies,
Crying my heart, my heart,
Let me in, let me in from the dark.*

*Jean Garrigue, Country Without
Maps*

Faces ghost my night this night again
fingers snake around the corners
to spy, and are very cold again
in the beginning there were only a few of these bones
I think Sibyl did not haunt me and once
grass was merely a growing thing
not a hard monument
to the dark frost

Grass is a promise
torn out and rootless
it rests in sad places, on pavements
is the echo
of clothing
you no longer wear

Each edge points to the grapes
bitter beneath the vine arbor
of Manselle
offering me a mask

but it can only be a mask

with no red

with no arteries

with vinegar

23.

The line starts at the top of the head
and plummets
center rages and smokes
sparks tendrils, embracing the photo
the burnt body

She was Atropos' friend
cords coiled about her neck more than once
they were always beating at the cage bars
sadly seeking a fool's way out
they were hers
they couldn't tell any story at all
couldn't say the grandmother
was buried
with her fury and thunder, next to
that green bird she loved
couldn't grope their way to the mother
who left, no farewell or none with meaning
the day that happened
bequeathing threads and
thread and
threads
and a broken needle
and boxes of dead fabric
breathing slowly in the
basement, in the attic

to her daughter

The line, the black one

It moves in the wrong direction

it is your fault I kept trying to whisper

you took it

and put it around her neck

never bothering to learn

how to cut the cord

that hangs vertically

and binding

The mother

who always had somebody else

to care for

bequeather of thread, needle, cloth

but no shears I kept trying to say

24.

I see you as a taut wing of fragile older skin

- Jennifer Moxley

Chinese ink and sepia
that once was *brou de noix*
gave her silk and in the painting she
could almost see the steam
 of sunlight and a reason
 for the brushes
 held in her fist, tightly
 almost open

The glazed canvas waking to
forms scooped out by aching hands
not placed in front of her
not on the table where
ink and acrylic and pastel
crowded around
waiting to be chosen, and fearful of that
just placed, without thinking

The hands ached
you refused to look at them
they knew nothing of art or image they also had
dug about in deep, dark holes
groped along the wet minerals of
 caves she'd found and entered

plucked seaweed from the
viscous bed of that immense river
scaled fish and tore away their entrails

Those were acts of love

Then she knew she had turned to stone
whoever touched her
doomed to become smoke
to her desire
to tell what she knew with only an open mouth

This one left
another followed
the box widened
chipped away by the leather belt of what could never be told
One had come
(she never learned to erase any images)

What was sealed with a precious stone
burst wide open
flight to stone began
pickaxe broke open the bones
that they never thought they could tell her
would not heal the
sharp white gravel she walked on
another brought a silver tray
from the North

and she began to paint again
brief portrait and thorns
The stonecutter shaped a fleshed-out
form made of hazelnut wood
to match the eyes, forgetting
the effect of stone on trees of any kind
the hazelnut that shattered
the hands that ached
fused with the splinters
that had fled the adze and plane

And you condemned the stonecutter
of the mistaken tool
to paint, instead, forever, like Sisyphus
bathing canvas in an ooze of sepia
stroking its small surface with ragged black
veins, a calligraphy
of those hard spaces that
only stoned you when
she tried to let you in

25.

The hand almost opens

the hand opens one last time
palm up, eyes in the center
as if she were Saint Lucia

yours, she says,
as clawed fingers snap shut
trapping you fatally
angry, because you
blinded her

26.

*Do not go gentle into that good
night,
rage, rage against the dying of the
light.*

Dylan Thomas

This is all a shroud and now
although invitation sighs within
the punch of the beggar
 a warning for the arm
 the heart tolls
final act
a veil of seaweed
a figure of white or black
a magenta tempest of syllables
she never heard herself say
they barely formed words
 tiny little angry little dark beasts
 or ants, fire ants
 a mouth that was something else

 anthill of lava
 windmill fanning the flames
 of the wind
 in the scarlet heart

Walls shattered, and she stepped forward, unfettered
saw the edge
she would later know was there
her threshold
her pure rage

27.

She's the mistress of contrast between clatter and silence

- Wislawa Szymborska

choosing silence is waiting for mouth
sounds to stop bellowing, stretching
your bones out straight, making
room for flesh to think

there can be miscalculations
and the flesh grows too long
then it shatters, stretching
femurs and clavicles
you try again to clutch silence
you can only limp and crash into
the night that is tauter than your hands and has, of course, her face
you try to look beyond it
there must be other faces that clatter
less and are willing to
smile in your direction

then you consider the fragments there
will be no silence to lean
on tonight un-
less you place the unborn in

a flask
of cool, runny mercury
and wish them away
or drink from the round dark oval you know

28.

*Mirrors!... commanding all
the scattered sweetness
into themselves again.*

Rainer Rilke

I touch the long grey rectangle and the river
making sure I cannot see my eyes or mouth
the error appears as transparent now as
an unused wineglass of unscoured crystal
the deep valley of years etches the slick flat waves
and silhouettes the shadow of a child in a tiny shared bed
the only one left because the only
one born to remain and not ask for the dregs

but you are not supposed to be here groveling
in plain sight of my gelid fingers
you do not belong in front
of a face looking in some northern direction
unless

things from back there behind the mirror
can find a
way to inhabit these fingers without seeing
the wrong road
the one taken, the blurred words
the traitor before me dictated before she
stumbled to her only end

I look at the Norwegian sunset, all red and flowing

Taking fingers from the frozen river of mercury, you
crouch down, shiver only once
put them to your tongue
 know their flavor

29. On Roethke

This is never a place I built and it was not yours
neither of us understands wood or stone except to
walk and bury things we do not need or
that have died
we cannot talk about this

My secrets cry aloud.

I have no need for tongues.

A rifle has its sight set on an unidentified
part of a body and does not look away
one shiver, one step, and it will fire
anything left open will close now, forever

My heart keeps open house,

My doors are widely swung.

An epic of the eyes.

An iris has a slit that we do not create it has only
a slash of blindness and

My love, with no disguise.

When the bed or the walks by the river splinter
you, they mirror me and wash you away
because there is little of me to have here

My truths are all foreknown,

This anguish self-revealed.

I'm naked to the bone.

With nakedness my shield.

This can be opened and is uncertain: a shallow furrow leads
to shoes and gloves and other garments

I should have taken them off before entering this house
there was room to leave them and now I cannot recall where
I acquired them nor the name of the giver but they are all given
away if you can believe

Myself is what I wear:

I keep the spirit spare.

The monument remains or many monuments remain
they may all be mirages of but one and we might all
walk through the stone of silhouettes or die trying because

The anger will endure,

The deed will speak the truth

the distance between one and the next one is not measured
translate the fist-shaped organ that is yours, or mine

In language strict and pure.

Wash, spread ashes, hang hyssop and
ask for the blue part of borage, but do not remember the once-said

I stop the lying mouth:

Rage warps my clearest cry

to say the story to kill the story and nod to them all
lifting every oval part of the body to the level of thunder
distorted and saddened at having lost you, or us,
free, perhaps, now of slavery

To witless agony.