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*A Parallel Press Chapbook*

*Alley Scatting*

Poems by  
Sharon F. McDermott





A P A R A L L E L P R E S S C H A P B O O K



# *Alley Scatting*

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Sharon F. McDermott



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FIRST EDITION

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. . .we walked  
To where it would have wet our feet  
Had it been water.

George Oppen

Actual loss . . . was a release, an abrupt transition from anticipation to expertise. In passing, I learned something about fire, about its appetite. I watched the destruction of all that had been, all that would not be again, and all that remained took on a radiance.

Louise Glück, "The Dreamer and the Watcher,"  
from *Proofs & Theories*

*In memory of my father Raymond F. Fagan.*

## *The Ways: On Image*

All June, the air hangs like dog drool.

Tunafish can left on a sidewalk:

filled by flies,  
emptied of flies, filled by ants, emptied

of ants. No rain falls. The can loses its label.  
Becomes a clutch for gazes on daily  
walks, a locus of loss.

Zinnias bloom, peak early,

toss seed,  
faint dead away. Grass bleeds

color, shrivels. The can remains a fixture on the route, a tree  
or stone, an avenue. How is it that in this crumbling  
neighborhood, no one even kicks it once?

It fills—no word for that which fills—no overflows—  
empty rooms within. Summer plows on: bluejay  
in the yard, picked clean, except for feathers

like jagged bits of sky. The can remains my asterisk.

The world revised,  
renewed in this luminous round—

tin? or steel? Aluminum? I hardly know what  
makes a can a can.

August thrusts on—dreadful month of heat & campy

excess. You know the end; we all do. One morning, it's gone,

swiped, sewerred, trashed in plastic bag. My  
*vena cava*. My Morning Star. My course in letting go.

## Plague, *Eden Way*

Unwieldy cursive, black paint.  
Herod's curse is scrawled on the gray

wall: *Plague!* Off 45th a stone's throw  
from the river, paradise's going to hell

or, at least, to a strangle of weeds. *Plague!*  
The locusts crackle, shrill their arrival.

August sun buckles the porches, summer  
of drought, of mosquitoes that bear

a new virus. Ben and Amy '94 is tagged  
beneath, an attempt at a heart

that looks more like a melanoma. *Plague!*  
And the train rackets past, rusty moan,

riverside. Haste, haste, and a whistle  
blows. Crate of blue flies. Heat into rubble.

## *MidLife*

Something came out of the night  
like a cat, if cat is the substance  
of moon before rain, half-erased,  
blotted white.

Something came  
out of the night—like a young  
woman running, if woman is  
moon unlaced into ribbons  
of beams, trailing.

It was not as predatory as a wolf,  
did not bare raw gums or  
sharpened canines.

Something came out  
of the night like boxcars of snow,  
tippling grunts, linked and rumbling.

It was not a small gesture, not bug  
splat on windshields or cracked  
ice in a blue drink. It reeked  
of old leather boots worn on the day  
the house frame was lifted in place,  
smelled like the gold shells of  
beetles, crushed in the blowsy heart  
of a peony.

It smelled of a day  
when rain translated your crumpled  
homework into ships in a boiling sea  
(the gutters ran fast, paper stayed above water)  
and you watched, dazzled on the edge  
of their tipping into the black  
maw of the sewer.

Something came out of the night—  
and it mattered—like the flight of a bee  
if that flight were zigzags suspended  
like small forks of lightning  
in turgid air.

Something came out of  
the night, like I did, if "I" is a scattering  
of spirits or an old chain, relinking.  
I called out to it; I invited it home.

## *Alleys*

claim the fringe  
space, private horde of trash  
cans, chained dogs, sneak  
and dodge, the fitful

weeds and thugs between  
cracks. The place we fear  
on unmooned nights. But  
daylight drags children out

from shadows to four squares,  
stick ball, their secret cruelties  
tagged on crumbling brick.  
Lives thicken, furrow,

gangly as weeds—away  
from prying eyes of backyard  
parents. This in-between  
world is Alice's tumble-

down the hole  
of the fantastical. Old homes,  
blunt with dust and  
arguments, turn their backs.

The hands of danger  
linger on the chain-link fence.  
Blue glass on asphalt:  
cracked jagged, glinting.

## Trash

Museum of ruin! *Garden Way's* a mess  
of overflowed dumpsters, smashed  
beer bottles and cobblestones split  
from deep-rooted weeds. It's the crack  
between ordered lives—in which collects  
rust, dirt, butts, pooled  
rainwater, all that we've run through, forgotten,  
all that we once swore we needed, spoiled  
and reeking under searing sun.  
Like the red Schwinn's crumpled  
handlebars, or the fractured heap of two  
white chairs, forlorn against a rusty paintcan.  
Williams once wrote *so much depends upon*;  
here we witness the end of desire: ring of flies  
circling a half-bit peach.

Yet, in those white remains  
of chairs—a radiance—maybe only noon's harsh  
rays, and yet, they glow with the translucence  
of leaving. Like the skin of my younger brother's  
face, a month before he died,  
when we sat against the overwhelming  
blue of sky and heard waves batter  
the small bones all around us.



## *Poem Ending on His Name*

Midnight. The groans of porn  
videos filter through the floorboards  
above me. I'm tired, cranky,  
let myself think, *Old queer!* as he paces  
hardwood half-singing? moaning?  
I barely know him though I've lived  
beneath him for a year. His heart  
gave out last spring, or so the landlord ratted;  
the surgeon cleared five highways for his blood  
to move again. Yet, he remains cloistered—  
this old Victorian home—a breathing space  
we share. I hunch under my comforter,  
the muted *you like that?* The grunting *yes,*  
*yes.* The sexual sounds that bind us  
to each other this cold night. Two years since  
my lover moved a world away. I imagine  
my neighbor, alone, a worn and fragile  
servant to his loneliness. I reach for  
sleep: my memory calls up our single  
conversation, when my own name brought a smile  
to his lips—*My favorite niece's name*  
*is Sharon*—the only time I touched his  
hand—and smiling—called him *Bob.*

## *The Rottweilers*

Muscled Tanks. They charge the fence, engines  
of rage. Slathering fangs. I knew better than to walk  
this corridor of chance, box-hedged, blind.  
And now my own dog stiffens, low growls.  
Too far in—they lunge, snap—crocodiles!  
—spring straight up to clear the too-low fence,  
to carve—*jesus!*—their own crime scene.  
Oh, empty space, cans thundering down!  
I've crossed the line, off-street, past human help.  
And the price paid? Twin guardians of Hades  
whose pure intent might missile them  
into my quaking knees.

But my dog is my Shepherd—propels me  
outside the zone of fracture, punctured flesh  
to safety, streetside. I brush against the thorny  
roses of a cultivated garden. But who's to say  
I wouldn't choose it all again? The heart  
in its valorous dance. To face, and move beyond  
the demons' yowls and cannon heads—  
two storm clouds in the gap between.

## *Burning the Dog*

What punk rage led the boy to lash the dog  
to chainlink fence, the pit bull who roamed  
the neighborhood for handouts, loose trash?

What tripped the boy's machine  
of madness into motion? What crack  
finally tore open to reveal the maggots  
of a child's dead heart?

He lit the match, asked the dog to give  
his paw, and when it did, he lit the paw on fire.  
The animal screamed—ungodly wail!—

a circle of children around him—that hideous  
audience—while neighbors latched their screen  
doors, turned the volume on their TV's louder.

Fireball of fur and hide—his patches  
of brown and white became a continent of broiling  
nerves—pain jerked him howling again and  
against the fence, world without end, without end,

the animal crazed, strong enough, even dying  
to wrench free from his tortures—  
to race for cover of bushes while the brute

children rained brick and stones down on it. Be afraid  
if your child stood there watching.

The dog, finally dead, curled into its raw  
self under the soft brush of peonies. The damed left

for home—for lunch, for baseball bats and videos. Not one  
looked back, not one cried out *Stop!* And parents kept deaf  
ears to radios, CDs, TVs. Who didn't love these children

hard enough? Don't tell me *no one is to blame.*

I will not—cannot!—love them, even when it is the lack  
of love that will slam them, again and again,  
against the blunt heft of their own charred hearts.

## *New Fence, Olga Way*

The rusted old is rolled up by the dumpster—scrap.  
Its holey nature let in too much neighborhood:

the boy, in navy uniform, who, mornings, snuck  
a smoke against the charred garage. The pierced

cashier from *Hollywood Videos* who french-  
kissed her tattooed boyfriend hard against brick walls.

The gnarled man who hacked and spit into a mess  
of weeds and broken glass. But new planks

of wood form a golden shield that shuts the yard  
into its zone of bee-drunk grass, the tranquil poufs

of impatiens floating in ordered beds. Now, new  
lawn chairs gleam beneath the leafy maples.

The pet cat stalks butterflies while tethered  
to a clothesline. There'll be iced tea and family games

of wiffle ball. Of course, the world will bleed through  
cracks: stewing trash, the lilac's oversweet perfume,

the tang of neighbor's barbecue. And shards of sound  
will pierce the harmony: old Italians arguing, a phlegmy

cough, some muffled sobs and those relentless  
footsteps—all the faceless—passing through.

## *Blue*

Stooped woman at the alley's end, corona  
of white hair, her dress, so blue, like sun-raked  
waters off Sardinia. Her dog thrusts  
his nose into a jut of weeds and she creeps,  
cane in hand, her blue dress blue  
as a new life in the States. Italy  
is past, the duomos with gilded Madonna's,  
the vine-braided hills of Tuscany, weighty  
with grapes and chestnuts. She's as far as  
she will come; the closed mouths of garages  
line her walk—inscrutable as the chatter  
of American TV. One step beyond the alley,  
her blue streams out like sea foam  
riptides of seawater  
like Neruda's island bells  
noon bells, ringing  
pools into a plastic grotto of the Virgin  
Mary, chipped and fading, cool  
blue and serene on grasses.

## *St. John's Way*

*he speaks—*

Why have you entered here? What did you expect?  
Dancing on these ruined streets? The stars hitched low  
to shingles? Scent of pears? I've howled  
my message to a bunch of cats in oily gutters. Why  
were you surprised to find Him faceless in the glass?

You'd only stumbled into one lonely shortcut  
among many. So, houses shut their blinds.  
Slammed doors. Chorus of snoring. Couples flinched  
from the comfort of each other's bodies. A wind  
of blue stones. Loose news burned in dark corners.

My teeth are gone, hair a nest of rats. Ruin. Ruin!  
And that big blank of a church ahead. They jeered, called  
me deranged. But hadn't they built that tomb of pews?  
Filled all the holes with brilliant glass? Hadn't  
any of them heard the old and valued stories?

I talked of love; they dragged the children back inside  
in front of television screens. Hear the locusts?  
Their razoring begins. And there, you gawk with fool's  
fear in your eyes. See the puddle before you?  
It collects itself into a bottomless lake.

## *Rain, Streetlight*

*in memory of Brendan*

Puddles like small lagoons. A dog's distant yowl.  
Streetlights flare the pavement into dawn. The elm tree's down,

*(you were the boy asleep in my lap, the long ride home. little brother)*

dragging splintered branches in the mud, melancholy  
as the crows in Van Gogh's final wheat field.

*(warm cub! breathing. I rocked you in the station wagon.)*

Why the lightning? Why the sudden flight? Tonight,  
you skulked in the pocket of this neighborhood,

*(mom said, "move him over. sleep yourself. it's too long a ride to hold him.")*

made this blind alley a vale of the dead. I don't blame you.  
Rain slipped the snapped trunk; leaves sank, beaten down.

*(i hummed "blackbird." you burrowed into me, slept.)*

It was just a tree uprooted by the storm and could not explain

*(such a small story—and yet, and yet—)*

why the rainy street turned tangerine with light,  
why the old grief smelled of early June, wet earth, honeysuckle.



## *After the Storm: Diptych*

### BLACKOUT

When trees crashed down all over Bloomfield—  
shallow-rooted firs, sixty-year old  
elms—they took the wires with them (tangle  
of asps.) Lights died. Phones stopped jangling.

—they ripped down the fish hook moon.

(Stars fizzled, skewered on the ends of branches.)  
Pitch streets, coal yards. Blackness, the new order,  
clandestine designs. Alleys ran dark,  
fluid as petroleum.

Police orange-coned  
the blocks, shut them down. The neighborhood  
became a harrowing mine, small fires flaring  
in windows. Cats, color of ash, skulked  
beneath old Dodges in the back streets.

Shadows filled our footsteps,  
followed us home. What to do in a new world  
governed by fear? Disorder was the civilized—  
phone poles snapped and slumping, gangly  
whiskers twitching ground.

The unyielding void  
took over everything, inking under  
porches, creeping up the sleeves of my loose  
blouse. It took me to my bed early, restless.  
Wilderness returned, the naked body.

## HEADLIGHTS: ASTERISK WAY

Convertible. I'm caught. Ringed in the glare of halogen lights. A boy hoots, one-handing the wheel, a slouched, bored GAP ad, nonchalant. His passenger's blonde hair tacks like a sail in the alleyway. Do they imagine themselves at the helm of an auto commercial that targets young kids who have bought the whole highway cliché, who have charged the whole highway on mom's gold card?

I'm still in the road, in the way of their evening. And I'm jaded and weary of smug, pretty people, of America's lust after youth. Their laughter throws rings around me—wooden peg to their merry toss. Do they think, do they know, can they see on their gold road to Oz? (Ah, *But I'm old and they're young/and I speak a barbarous tongue.*) Asterisk Way, symbol for what's missing. Am I visible?

Viable? My dog slowly pees, (blocking their car), then thrusts his nose into a rank sneaker and breathes in, tail wagging, as if to say, *this is the moment, here, now*. Over the fence, June's draped bawdy roses which swim in gold headlights. Roses smell of old worlds, speak of unexplored wilds, of time still left to adventure while the boy beats a path on his horn, honks *move now! move now!*  
*Time to move—Now!*

## *Still Life: Transvestite, Daylilies*

Because he's still *becoming*, because he's six-foot four, at least, and growing out blonde hair, because he wears a faded floral blouse, maybe from the local Goodwill, and men's nicked work boots. Because his small breasts shrink beneath his massive shoulders and his gait seems off, crooked, as if both legs, stiff as pokers, had been snapped and glued—slap-dash—back together. Because he stops in the hot Way—exhausted, anguished, pink lipsticked mouth tugged down, eyes casting about—and leans against a fence ablaze with orange lilies. (They are half-blown cornets, not quite become the trumpets of full bloom.) Because the sturdy stalks of green lean in toward his reckoning, his face, haggard as chipped bricks. Because the summer sun has forced him into spotlight. Because this tableau of *in-between* is both about erasure and new blooming. Because he's simply someone feeling sad. Then let the *why* be lost. Ask instead: Who willingly transforms? Who names the metamorphosis? How will we finally know the hour of arrival?

## *Blind Alley: September*

*in memory of Raymond Fagan*

And through an open window, I glimpsed another  
open window, and beyond that, willows  
with late summer sun raking the shadowed  
catkins. The field was full of flags.

When the wind blew hard, they became wings  
of a thousand blue cranes. And women stole  
among the billowing fabric, sang softly  
the names of the dead. And their names stuck

like hosts on their tongues, and they swallowed the flat bread  
of them down. The field turned into a harvest—  
fallen fruit. And women reaped and sang,  
trailed solid roots between their fingers.

But, in truth, the flags were only sheets to the wind, wood  
in the hands. Something fleeting to hold. People dispersed  
back to their small offices. And then you, father,  
at last, entered that window beyond

the window. Your mouth became a *cave through which the spirit  
flowed*—past cheek, tongue, marbling skin, past blankets  
and transom and out toward a scrubbed blue—  
The sun was cracked glass, shattering over everyone.

After weeping, we walked through the field of stones, singing.  
And through an open window, another—  
The blue vein, still bright in the white of your hand.  
The blue vein, bright. Still.

## *My Mother's Alley*

had a Tuesday racket:  
the low bronze clang and gong of cowbells  
jouncing from posts of the junkman's cart.  
His horse snorted, clopped past backyards  
and rose bushes, the wet sheets drying  
on the lines. *I Cash Clothes! I Cash Clothes!*  
he'd bellow to housewives there in Jackson  
Heights, New York, 1938. Before  
World War II and all it took from him,  
before my mother wound balls of string  
and silver foil, to contribute to the war  
effort. Back when she longed to be grown up,  
a woman in silk stockings, tough and smart  
as Barbara Stanwick in *Double Indemnity*.  
*I Cash Clothes! I Cash Clothes!* the junkman sang  
out there in Queens. And Mom and Marianne,  
her friend, raced round brick houses to the alley  
where movie magazines lay stacked,  
glossy. It was their weekly competition:  
beat the junkman to the pile. *I Cash  
Clothes! I Cash Clothes!* But they had won,  
were searching for a hidden place  
to flip through their windfall. There, among stains  
and empty cans: Glamour! Satin gowns  
of scarlet-puckered stars, the handsome  
black and whites of Gary Cooper on location.  
Here, free from her mother's disapproving  
glare, she rose up in her dreams of one day  
looming larger, the leading lady—tough,  
beautiful, and classy—flickering—  
on the silver screen.

## *Full Moon, Rosina Way*

Heat hangs in the dumpsters, a fog of dust  
and flies. And here, a woman's name—Rosina  
—on a street sign—angles down the narrow

Pittsburgh corridor between the cramped row-houses.  
White-haired *signora's* sweep stoops daily,  
whisk dust away from American flags,

and trim the upstart weeds with scissors  
near the plaster Virgin. Tonight, it is *la luna*,  
fat and watery inviting me to imagine

the black-bobbed curls of *Rosina*, her apron,  
her yellow cotton dress. How, on another full  
moon night, perfume from coral roses on the fence,

maybe in 1955, made her yearn for Lucca  
and its tree-lined promenade, for its hillside  
olive groves, instead of coal dust, hellfire

blasting from the stacks. (The moon has lured  
a history of women to the wells of memory.)  
Perhaps she shut her eyes and hummed the old

market back within her reach: basil, blood  
oranges, prosciutto. Perhaps the rivers breached  
their banks to carry down these memories

drifting on a stream of moontide. (Within,  
her husband snored, a hard day's dirt creased  
in his palms A good man who remained

an unmapped country.) Perhaps, Rosina dipped into  
that current and recognized *la vita nuova*  
translated as unmitigated *loss*. The new world

hemmed in by three-rivers, her own life fading at the edges  
like a sepia print: muted browns of hillsides, smoky  
gray of clouds, the silver signpost fading.

## *The Romantics: Aging*

Down Artemus Way (the huntress  
a long, faded shadow of quivers)  
I hear the undersong: spit, phlegm, the thrown  
away, hacking, the moldy and pocked. January

rain is raw as the skin on wintered hands.  
Heart, sad as the gray-lidded eyes of  
streetlights. I hurry the dog along deserted  
streets. Raindrops are weighty globes

resigning limbs. Tomorrow is all paper  
clips and staples, clean underwear and a fool's  
spritz of a perfume called *Tuscany*, to conjure  
the green-heated hills, ungainly

sunflowers outside Florence. Oh heart, will you  
never be done with the beautiful?  
This icy night's hard, a disdainful lyric,  
and I beg the dog to stop his nose-in-the-dirt

interviews. Even back in the wild world—green—  
I felt bereft—the empty room inside,  
the empty room. And in that gray chamber,  
a settling. Hushed. Dense. Done with fighting.

## October

after Yehuda Amichai

The cat people think that clawing is a sign of love.  
The dog people know that love is a tongue on the skin.  
The Squirrel Hill dwellers think that crime is in Friendship  
and those in Friendship think crime is having all that money without heart.

The wind carries silver across the sky—pebbled stars, watery moon.  
I say *October* and the globed vowels rise, burst on the surface like bubbles.  
I say *My father's birthday is now the last leaf of a book.*  
If you want to explain the spirit:

you had better put gas in your car, bulbs in your lamps:  
a way to push down the highway, that necessary light.

So what good is grieving? to be  
a small hum, ashen and jagged, a harmonica blown?

When you left the October planet, we didn't  
look at the moon for months,  
but near the old apple tree we saw the rotted fruit  
and within it, the spiraling bees, their driving hunger:  
all the howling of love, all the fierce endings.



## *Walking The Dog*

Old guy at the park—all wheeze—and goggles  
to aid his peripheral vision tugs at his Westie  
who's sniffing a crunched bag of chips.

My pup and I enter scene; Westie pokes  
triangle ears our direction, stands fur to fur,  
nose to butt with Rosie. Old guy pipes up:  
*Hermaphrodite!*

then I'm sure I've met the latest  
member of my local crazies club,  
the friendliest group in the neighborhood:  
chain-smoking Reena from the Personal  
Care Home who gives me rubberband  
bracelets or Jay, the forty-year old paper boy  
who whispers jokes to my pup.

*Excuse me?* I yank Rosie's leash forward,  
away. He scoops up Westie, spreads its shagged  
fur to reveal the joint chiefs of gender: penis/vagina.  
*Genetic*, he says. *God's little joke*. Plops the dog  
down. The two dogs do the play-bow, tumble, tie  
each other up leash dance. Queasy, uneasy, (*why's he telling  
me this?*) Old man cracks a grin—*Last thing my wife did  
before she died last summer. Named that dog.*  
*Victor/Victoria. Good sense of humor, my Mel.*

Breeze kicks trash to the curb. Pigeons,  
overhead, sway telephone wires. On the bench,  
an old man clutches his handful of crumbs.  
The park's a flawed island. We stand near each other.

## *Alley Sex*

Forget soft candles, pillows, tender  
murmurs—this was crush and hunger—  
lips, nipples, tongue and penis, heat  
hair, a whirl of losing

limbs to pleasure, forgoing safety  
and the small island of indoor  
mattress to find the edges of their skin,  
to find their boundaries breached

and breached again. It was brick desire—  
flight into the other. Trashed file cabinet  
cold against her back, another avenue  
to feeling. But here, mid-alley, gravity

of desire dragged her down, her hair  
a pull cord climbed, her hands, a singular  
song in the long scrapbook  
of sex. He rained his whole dark

lyric into her, hunger like a boot,  
a yacht, a talisman. Even concrete  
yielded. Ragged edges of bottles sanded  
their lips down. Men laid down

guns. Dying streets ran full of children.  
Even the sky warmed peach cirrus. Even  
the bus swallowed down its bruised smoke.  
Something in conquer without defeat.

## *Rollerblader, Sapphire Way*

O, I should have turned you into song, muscled legs  
pumping pavement, feet sprouting wheels—almost wings—  
your bare chest, lit with sweat, color of wheat, dense bread.  
I should have belt out, voice earthy and plowed as a spring field:

*Falcon, circle back to me. Let your brown wings cut a space  
in the endless sky, a space for a man to love earth, to fly.*

O, I loved your side-slid gaze at the stranger who gaped  
at your graceful glissando over gravel and pothole,  
your arms, sleek as new seals in cool streams. You were one  
continuous flow: river down spine, rain on hair, your eyes, high tide

in the ocean. And your slow smile for the voyeur,  
for your own *sotto salsa*, mid-alley, Pittsburgh, world without end.  
O, body of motion, body of light! You were a gold coin rolling,  
a bank full of shimmer, wheels grinding pebbles to stars.

How I should have moaned, voice blue as bones in the roiling sea:

*Falcon, circle past this city, Sorrow. Let your brown wings cut a space  
in the endless sky, a space for a man to love earth, to fly.*

## *Widow, Corday Way*

Each morning in the slow-breathing dark, they piled the bundled papers in the backseat, clicked on seatbelts, slid companionably down the city blocks: Woodbine, South Pacific, Biddle,

Harriet, Evaline. Gray sycamores were sentries, the homes pitch and slumbering. Cats trailed shadows across their path. No morning radio—they didn't need

empty chatter after forty years together. Retirement, at first, had not sat well with him; he took a job delivering papers for the city *Post*. These mornings gave him second wind; his heart repaired its dangerous

arrhythmias. She felt blessed to sit within the heat of their station wagon, watch his pitching arm revitalize, the rhythmic thud, thud, thuds of papers hitting stoops. On that morning, 4 AM,

she was still a married woman with husband at the wheel, while on the street a young man—clean cut, bored—kicked at the walk bent with old rage. Cried out *Help!* Her husband pulled curbside, opened

his door wide to bullets that shred his thigh, the major artery. Blood pooled on his slacks, on the newsprint in his hand. He gazed, bewildered, once more at his wife, slumped down and she woke

to fury, seized the steering wheel, stomped the accelerator—tried to mow the shooter down, this thief who slipped up Corday Way like dirt, dust—the ashes of their former lives.

She fled onto Liberty, empty of light, of souls—and toward the hospital—the awful march of hours still ahead, the sun not yet risen, church bells—silent—in the belfry of St. Anne's.

## *No Name Alley*

I entered out of simple curiosity, because rain was  
because fog had wooled the split pooling there,  
fence—into animal—mammalia!—

and I yearned to touch its sway-backed spine,  
because touch reminds me I'm alive and venturing forward in a body.

(body as paper lantern, body as light beyond bones' blueprints)

I entered, though there was no drama there, no petty thief's  
drop-kick-garbagecan-crash  
out of sheer adrenaline joy at getting away

with something in the small shop of human law.  
No performance from the make-out queen

and her boyfriend who stocks produce in the market—huge nests  
of oranges and pears, vine tomatoes—

(O, to live out all my days within his pyre of soft blue plums!)

—when he's not unhinging  
his jaw to kiss his girlfriend in this alley.

Alley without name, I entered here to force my hand, to scrape coarse  
gravel, to skin the bullet of a sololife  
and find beneath, a child magician

with her one-trick quarter. Here—today—because:

(another ghost walks next to me, and I, with all my body on.)





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