

(SCENE: A New York apartment. A single unmade bed, upstage center. THE COUPLE has just left the room. Perhaps their shadows are visible near what could be a doorway. The angle of the light on the sheet slowly becomes more acute as if a door is closing. One imagines the hands of a clock, their own changing compositions. How long is this going to take? Light reveals the bedroom door has, in fact, closed. The kitchen is also empty upstage left, unlit except for an oven timer blinking 12:00. An amber light begins to fall across the details of the bedroom. Fade to black.)

I call it sorrow, but who am I to say
what replaced the kiss with such a myth as this.
My God, I am my father, made of clay—
but Daddy, who are you? A mark, a fist?
A glove for one? Not really. Only the ghost
of pain, or what is passed to a boy through ~~love~~
holding.

So that what we find in time is only the lost
genealogy in us. A family's not enough
to keep me, though it ~~does~~
will. Unbroken vow,
unbridled passage from one room to another
in the house that is not the house you know.
Ask the sister, ask the only brother,
and he'll tell you: ~~love~~
a home is made of something better:
a rock that holds, a piece of gold to enter.

(THE COUPLE enters the kitchen. One looks in the refrigerator while the other washes his hands, then starts a pot of coffee. A comfortable dance: they get what they need without speaking. One breaks their silence.)

Did you clip your nails? I want you up by ~~eight~~.
ten

Could you send the DVDs back in the morning this time?—and call the super, ask him about the men working on the roof. Do the laundry first thing or you'll forget. Don't look at me like that. I know you, Billy. And I did it last time, so it's only fair.

(There is a necessary quiet.)

Oh what a day. We have so much to do tomorrow. Scratch my back—Oh, cut my hair. So what's for dinner? No, I'd rather you cook. What did *you* do all day? I hope you checked your loan. Get the bed ready. Billy, don't give me that look. Oh no, I'm sorry. I forgot to charge your phone. Because I was replacing the money we lost while you were sleeping. Plus, I was making toast.

(There is an unnecessary quiet.)

NOTE ON SET AND COSTUME:

The set should be constructed realistically, but without fidelity to proportions. Colors especially should seem distorted, a little like a doctored image, though the difference should be so discreet as to be unnoticeable. The effect should be soothing, like stepping into the old house you grew up in. The familiar is in conversation with the sublime. The boys wear each other's clothes.)

(SCENE: Another apartment, another time. Florida: late morning. THE POET steps into the kitchen, looks in the fridge and begins to pull out breakfast things: some eggs, what's left of a loaf of bread. He looks at the clock as if it is set with the correct time.)

While you were sleeping, I was making toast.
While I was cooking, you were fast asleep.
And in our quickening, I thought I heard you, lost
to some slow flurry, beginning to break. The sheath
around you splitting, the root like a foot in the door.
And your body: how I wanted to be that gravity
showing the way. N, how I longed for more,
and how I longed for you. To call for me.

(THE POET places a plate of food and a glass of orange juice on a cutting board and carries it like a tray into the bedroom. He closes the door behind him with his foot.)

And yet nothing seemed enough — or rather
nothing seemed to stir you as I came,
my arms full of eggs, my quiet answer
 bearing
 balancing
of *Buenos Dias*. Your lips were the same
as mine, your soured breath, your slow wake.
I was your waiter, you my silvered snake.

(THE POET returns to the kitchen less gracefully for his own plate and glass, along with some paper towels and silverware. He returns to the bedroom and again closes the door behind him.)

as ~~sun~~ comes ~~up~~, its birds untucking with song,
light on
is to find a kindness, pin it to the wall,
is to let it wake in its own time. All along
the streets, ~~lovers~~ were walking home from ~~love~~.
kids like us sex
I in my costume, trying to fall; you that starting dove.

(THE LOVER steps back onto the stage in front of the scrim and turns, releasing birds into the audience. The restaurant quiets.)

NOTE ON BIRDS: The specific category or number of birds is not important, though nothing overtly symbolic. No doves, for example, especially considering that last line. If a full range of small Floridian birds is available, the scarlet tanager would be ideal, specifically those found in or near Paynes Prairie. Their nesting habits and distinctive call would be appropriate for various elements of the performance, and their flight patterns would allow for dramatic shifts in mood as they appear and reappear at curious intervals.)

(SCENE: THE LOVER's bedroom in Florida. THE COUPLE lies together below the sheets. THE POET has his one arm under THE LOVER's pillow and another around THE LOVER's chest.)

You slept so soundly (satisfied by cold?),
but me, I'm only human: I have needs:
I had to ask. *Remember how you told
me you would never want kids?* Until your body
was the size of the bed and the bed was the size of the room.
And you could easily fill it alone. So I left;

(THE POET stays put.)

you barely noticed what lay beside your dream
wasn't me, but the hollow after a minor theft.

(THE POET quietly slides his arm out from under THE LOVER's head, rolls over and hugs his pillow. THE LOVER wakes and speaks, his eyes still closed.)

Do we have to talk about this now? You're right,
we should both be sleeping. Waiting for a world
to form is useless. No sense in starting a fight
that has no answer—nor a question. Boy or girl?

our future has no name, no shape, no seed.
I cry, alone, until I fall asleep.

(THE POET whistles softly and a bird from high up on the rig, among the lights, comes down to preen on the headboard. It sings a small song.)

(SCENE: A nightmare: the stage turns back, revealing the same apartment in New York we were first welcomed into. Nothing has been altered. The kitchen still smells like coffee. The light, however, suggests late dusk. THE POET is alone in bed.)

I cry alone until I fall asleep,
my ~~only soldier~~, beaten bird of prey.
ownly souldier

(The wealthy patrons in the audience begin to walk out on the performance.)

You are the kind of kindness men dream of,

(The women in the audience begin to walk out also.)

though mined, made mine by longing, make me say
sorry things.

(THE POET begins to apologize, though no one else is on stage.)

Now that the hour has turned to burning,
now that the ~~river~~
creek has turned its ~~mind~~
mouth to ~~money~~
mine:

(The black people in the audience also leave.)

the mind knows only what you put before it, learning
itself a sort of disbelief.

(THE POET gets out of bed, puts on a shirt. The gay men in the audience leave also.)

Oh N, if only
~~finity existed~~
~~temperance was earned~~

*(THE POET throws something
against the wall. The birds in the
audience scatter.)*

accidents could lead us too toward parenthood.
I want to stay cool when my circuits go. The feast
in me, your plenty, can hold as well, or fold
upon hinges made not to yield. A martyr? Please.
It was your oil that helped me find my voice:
It cracked with love; It broke without a choice.

(The birds settle.)

(Another night. THE COUPLE enters the apartment, exhausted. One can smell the alcohol on their breath from as far as the fourth row. THE LOVER laughs suddenly as if for no reason. THE POET lays on the bed without moving whatever is on it. The dog whines, unable to get onto the bed.)

It cracked ~~with~~ love; it broke without a choice.
our

(THE LOVER enters the bedroom, sees him and seems annoyed.)

The sound of rain, the sound of men in rain.
Did you ask about those workers on the roof?

(THE LOVER pulls at THE POET's sleeve.)

The sound of nothing. The sound of nothing on.

(THE LOVER shakes him and he stirs. The dog whines again and THE LOVER bends down to lift her onto the bed.)

You know the sadness that ~~composes~~
makes up a night like this,

(The dog licks THE POET awake. He groans angrily and rolls over. The dog jumps to the floor and runs under the bed. Lights to black.)

after liquor turns a red eye off. My body back on
you, our unmaking, seeming bound by a kiss.
If only you could see it how I do. Believe me, Honey,
I'm sorry. For the long breath lost at the end of a life.
For the taste of it in your mouth, my battered wife.

NOTE: I'm missing some lines here: (to be expanded).

(Late afternoon. A third interior: a table attached to the wall, a television and a couch. The television is on, but neither of the players seem to be watching. THE POET writes in a black journal. THE LOVER types on a laptop.)

I'm sorry for the way I make you feel
even in poems about love. You should be shown
happiness for a while as I read them. Still,

(THE LOVER looks up.)

I pull the tender meat from tendered bone,
turn the TV down so you can't hear the anchor
above me. I only want your full attention.
But what you find is not sweet: a kiss, some thanks, or
even sex, coming up from that sweeter page.

*(THE LOVER makes room for
THE POET beside him on the
couch.)*

No mention,
of love in these love poems—or if so, only the noun
left abstract for the neighbors to dismantle.

*(The scene begins to change before
the exchange has ended. Objects
are carried away as if no one will
notice the intrusion.)*

A poem is less a gesture than what is found
in one—if I revise you out, replace this candle
with some headlights, it's so they'll believe the story:
a smile still filled with sorrow: a mapping of this city.

*(As the last words are revealed,
THE COUPLE attempts a kiss, but
the scrim is lowered in front of the
scene, which changes before their
lips meet.)*

(SCENE: The stage has been transformed back into the restaurant's interior. As the lights rise behind the scrim, we can soon make out THE COUPLE talking in a booth.)

My smile still filled with sorrow, a map of the city,
you drew with a crayon on the back of a paper mat.
I found you alone and hoped to take you with me.
Outside, the cars were passing, fastened to black
velvet. A hood of rock, and a farther ~~stone~~
moon
can make for reckless romance. At our booth,
a stillness. I knew you were lonely, though not alone:
you had a smile like a promise: you bent for truth,
sketched the shapes of buildings on the land,
added the statue—

(As THE LOVER sketches, the map of New York appears brightly on the scrim. The more he sketches, the brighter the scrim and the less able we are able to see the scene unfolding behind it.)

Funny, where we now live
was missing, like you couldn't fathom my hand
in yours, our bed inside this bustling hive.
And now we sleep in a sound like an answer
to that promise: ~~a crackling ease,~~
~~wings lifting from the dancer~~
a crackling ease, a rising from the street.

(THE POET stands and takes a step toward the register, then turns, expecting THE LOVER to follow. THE LOVER seems less sure, though after several long seconds he stands, gathers his things and follows. As they wait at the register, THE COUPLE turns to face each other. Their lips finally meet.)

(INTERMISSION)

(SCENE: Back to the New York apartment. Another morning. The birds have made various nests in the kitchen: one on the windowsill, for example, another in the spice rack. The sound of chirping grows in intensity as THE POET enters. He doesn't seem to notice either the nests or the noise.)

As for the promise, the crackling in the street,
I am only one witness. I wake to hear the weather
asleep ~~on the sides of buildings~~
in the air before people come to meet
seducing
begging
the day to start. Have you heard, yet, of forever?—
the trick is not to notice you're forgetting
what happiness was like before it was complete
in you. And to let the next day come on by letting
a pigeon roost on your air-conditioner.

(THE POET opens a cabinet and birds fly out. He doesn't seem to notice at first, but a moment later smiles, as if unsure what just made him happy.)

Sweet Chariot, sweet vinegar on the wind,
let the promise last unto death. I couldn't forgive
myself— If I gave up on Love (my friend,
my occasionally estranged and lovely relative),
lonely
I'd never know the common way to ~~tell~~
sell
the difference between what's heavenly and hell.

(SCENE: THE POET's apartment in Florida. THE COUPLE kiss at the edge of the bed. After several moments, THE POET leaps to his feet and riffles through the mess on his desk for a digital camera. When he finds it, he hops up and stands on the bed above THE LOVER, who alternately laughs and seems annoyed. He is ultimately annoyed. THE POET continues to take several pictures, THE LOVER eventually yells for him to stop. The audience is also growing annoyed.)

The difference between what's heavenly and hell:
two arms folded in disbelief: a scene
in which I ~~bend over you in bed~~
stand above you ~~with a camera~~
and the whole
shaking world is sure, finally, though you're mean
about it. You pout, refuse to smile, though your lips
say *take as long as you need*: your naked chest;
the imperfect skin you're afraid I'll see. Hold the ships
in the harbor; the storm is curious, though restful
in its way: we wander sincerity like wounded game,
and when the calm lets us close off alone
to die our little deaths together, pained—only
in that the breaths are cold with other coldness gone:
Smile, though it hurts to allow such a thing as this;
you're beautiful, my breaking heart, making room for a kiss.

(THE POET tries for one, but THE LOVER resists. A dance like no other: THE POET persists as the set is dismantled from around them. Eventually, there is nothing left of the bedroom. Lights flicker, then fade to black.)

*eat. It is not a family we know.
THE POET puts his hands to the
scrim like he would the glass of a
large window. The scrim moves,
distorting the images. THE POET
waivers with them.)*

if you want it, it will make you prove itself
over and over: the way a body changes for a birth:
first the house you know gets smaller, the books on the shelves
don't change, only their order. And the loss is worth it.

shift

The pearl that grows to break open its only shell.
~~Is there such a thing?~~
Can you believe I ever fought the swell?

*(The lights fall to black on both
stages, but the projected images
remain. Various photographs
continue to appear, though one
becomes noticeably repeated: THE
COUPLE eating dinner.)*

NOTE: There is a gap in the sequence here. Three sonnets yet to be composed.

(SCENE: THE COUPLE walks to
dinner from the subway.)

Are you okay? I'm fine, just thinking. Because—
did you see that guy on the subway who wouldn't stop
staring at us? At first I thought he knew who I was,
but then I figured him out. *He thought you were hot.*
He wanted to know you. Well yeah, of course. No, listen:
He caught my eye and smiled. He didn't say
what he wanted, but I could see his happiness and
He so wanted you. Shut up! I'm trying to explain.
He was old; he had a sadness in his hands.
He saw me holding yours. *What was he holding?*
I smiled back; I could tell he'd loved a man.
His smile said he was happy once, but ~~nothing~~...
no ring
I think he wanted thanks for ~~my~~ tenderness—
our
well didn't *want*, but got it nonetheless.

(SCENE: *A wedding—or rather the dream of a wedding. THE COUPLE sits together facing the audience. The birds have nested in the white chairs surrounding them. The faint sound of “The Wedding March” begins, as though being played in another room. The birds quiet.*)

I didn't want it but got it nonetheless:
that vision of the future: our families
bent before ~~our~~ kiss—sweet hand to bless
a
us, sweet unsteady hand to give us ~~peace~~

(THE LOVER *wipes at his eyes.*)

a piece
of heaven—followed, after, by one hell
of a party.

(THE COUPLE *laughs, then stands to applaud. The light around them dims so that only they are visible on the stage. They step forward to the edge of the stage, look up into the spotlight.*)

Open your eyes, dear. Look
at the whiteness: faces gathered by a bell-
rope. *But ours will be different: no dress, no book.*

(THE LOVER *wipes again at his eyes. THE POET takes his hand.*)

Open your eyes. Is forever enough for now?
Will it ever be? If we ~~forget~~ the absence,
give
~~but we can't.~~
if we can find a way to settle down
~~the voices~~
~~the few outspoken angels hoarding bliss~~

(THE POET *stands behind THE LOVER, covers his eyes with his hands.*)

I had a nightmare, Love, it went like this:

(THE POET whispers something in THE LOVER's ear. Out of the darkness, the birds fly up as if startled. Only those which pass through the spotlight are visible for a moment.)

our rooms weren't filled with laughter, blessings spilled.

(THE POET turns THE LOVER to face the chairs and removes his hands from his eyes.)

It didn't happen like that: the rooms weren't filled.

(The lights turn suddenly back on, revealing several rows of empty chairs. Someone who has come on stage to breakdown the chairs looks up at THE COUPLE startled, apologetic. After a second, he continues his work. THE COUPLE hesitates to help, then finally walk off stage. Once the chairs have been carted off, the lights shut off. End scene.)

(SCENE: THE POET *stands alone*
in THE LOVER's empty
apartment. He begins to sweep.)

It didn't happen like that. The rooms weren't emptied
of their contents. The sky didn't seize you by the hand.
Your plane took off, landed; you took what you could
while I hauled the rest myself, leaving behind
whatever we could do without. I counted our losses
equally, in twos, gave just as much away,
no less, but measuring isn't what ~~the fuss is~~

I'm about:

~~not everything's a poem~~

the poem is one lens. Some sudden endings
aren't beginnings. Still, ~~one~~ can't sleep in a bed without

we

unmaking it. Well, we *could*. But why
when there's so much underneath worth ~~messing up~~
talking about.

(*He empties the dustpan.*)

Come with me, under the sheets. We'll pretend we're hiding
from ~~death~~

~~love~~

~~losing~~

losing each other. We'll whisper, taking turns
playing that game we played, having just been born.

(THE POET *continues to sweep for*
several seconds. Cars pass outside.
Some wind chimes. Lights fade to
black.)

(SCENE: The lights rise after a few moments to reveal THE LOVER's apartment, though furnished again. The wind chimes sound again. After another moment, THE COUPLE enters through the kitchen.)

Playing those games we played, having ~~just been born~~
learned them wrong:
four months together, I said, *how about this*,
and I made you prove you'd listened all along:
Who was my first kiss? Who was my last
before you? And you'd hesitate, pretending
you couldn't keep them straight (insert the obvious
joke here).

*(The lights fade and rise,
punctuating the scene: another
time. An alarm clock sounds, and
THE LOVER turns it off, crawls
back in bed, puts his arm back
around THE POET, and sleeps.)*

At five months we'd lay all day in bed,
guessing how to make the other blush.

*(Once more the lights fade and
rise. THE COUPLE is still in bed,
though no longer touching.)*

At seven or eight, we'd grown tired of our bodies
touching as we slept. I curled up toward the wall;
you seemed relieved not to have to hold me
all night. Then after we made it a whole year,
we seemed to know the games could go on forever.
I kissed the wall, not wanting to wake my lover.

*(The remaining audience members
walk out on the performance in the
moments before the lights finally
fade.)*

(SECOND INTERMISSION)

(SCENE: The New York apartment. It is dark outside. None of the audience has returned for the final act. THE POET is alone. He sits, typing. Eventually, he stands, closes the curtains, strips to his boxers, leaving his clothes in a pile on the floor. He walks to the light switch and turns off the lights in the living room. The computer screen is all that lights the stage. He sits again at the computer.)

I ~~kissed~~ my palm, not wanting to wake my lover.
tongued

(THE POET stops and listens.)

Where are the birds? Where, with their applause?

(The screen flickers.)

The ~~lust~~ is un~~explainable~~; another
trust imaginable
couple might combust under such a set of laws:

(One could hear a bird on the stage, then many.)

the givens: no one else, not even a little—
unless only in dreams—but not if you mean it. (Best
sometimes to keep your secrets. But lie and it'll
haunt you.)

(THE POET stands, shuts down the computer. In the blue light before the screen goes black one could see the birds folding THE POET's clothes as they would in a commercial. He carries the tidied pile quietly into the dark bedroom.)

And then what's said: our changing tastes:
the darkening bodies, sites we have in common—
the laughter of a whisper with a wish—
the bed, our stage, the smoke that draws the curtain...
I think I've told you, but I'm kind of ticklish:
your mouth is a cure, your hand a courtesy:
just turn to my ear and whisper something dirty.

(The screen goes black.)

(SCENE: *The stage is dark. The sound of a door unlocking. Light slowly reveals the New York apartment. THE POET comes in from the front door, carrying groceries. As he opens the door, the dog runs down the hall to him, tail wagging. He greets her excitedly, then calls to THE LOVER, who is in the living room. He doesn't answer. THE POET turns the corner, sees him, and blows him a kiss. His coat still on, THE POET sits next to THE LOVER on the couch. The dog jumps up to join them.*)

Turn to my ear and whisper something dirty:
Your shoes left out, the dishes in the sink, ...

(A sigh.)

One would suffice. Well, that's a way to turn me
off—and you know there aren't many.

(THE POET stands, takes off his coat. The dog follows. THE POET sits to work at his computer, but stops.)

I give you ink;
you give me a reason. The silences, too, can be good:
a bottle of wine to help the work along,
the courtesies of man and ~~wife~~, the food
man
left out for the night: ~~an offering to the gods~~
a clue that ~~something's~~ wrong—
nothing's

Relax.

(THE POET sits again on the couch. The dog, again, jumps to join them.)

Sometimes the storm comes and it isn't
Shakespearean. Sometimes a broken dish
is just an accident. Embrace the pleasant
happenings as they happen, honey. Wish
for what you'd like, but look around: ~~all along~~
~~the watchtowers~~

They're watching us, these creatures brought to song.

(The birds reply.)

(NOTE ON BIRDSONG: The song of the male Scarlet tanager sounds something like "querit, queer, query, querit, queer.")

(SCENE: *The New York apartment, tidied up a bit. THE COUPLE finishes preparing for houseguests. As THE POET goes in for a kiss, the doorbell rings. He turns away, but THE LOVER grabs his collar, pulls him back. As their lips meet, the audience begins to notice the birds in the room. Once unobtrusive, they now preen and fly about wildly.*)

They're ludicrous, these creatures brought to song
at any sight of us—it's sweet, but please.
It's embarrassing! Our guests expect the dog,
but not these spangled bodies, feathered things,
to appear when we're not thinking:

(*The doorbell rings again. THE LOVER leaves to answer it while the poet frantically attempts to quiet the birds.*)

just a wink
and wings are beating near the brie, the bread.
Too many glasses of wine knocked over—think
of all the silences

(*THE LOVER entertains their guests in the kitchen while THE POET struggles to corral the birds into their bedroom. Just as he succeeds, THE LOVER and guests turn to face him. He blows a feather off of his lip, then kisses his guests on the cheek. THE LOVER speaks.*)

Just put your coats on the bed.

(*THE LOVER begins to lead them to the bedroom.*)

broken! Faithfully

(*THE POET shrieks, leaps to put his back against the door.*)

No! I'm undone. Don't get me wrong. I love
waking to *queer, query*, falling asleep with their red
hands on me. Their presence is welcome when we're alone—

like how when company has come for us,
I don't take out the crystal, just because.

(SCENE: The kitchen of the New York apartment. THE LOVER washes dishes while THE POET packs their things. THE COUPLE call for each other's help and neither answers. THE POET eventually comes into the kitchen, grabs a towel.)

THE POET: I don't take out the crystal just because it's *ours*. I don't write in your books because they're not mine—but the laptop is. If you're going to use it—

THE LOVER: I get the point.

THE POET: But do you?

THE LOVER: Yes! But you said you were going to fix the other one. If you did—

THE POET: I know. I remember.

THE LOVER: Fine.

THE POET: Okay.

THE LOVER: Okay.

(THE POET dries a pot and hangs it on a hook. THE LOVER scrubs another and becomes increasingly annoyed with his work.)

THE LOVER: Do you think you could do some laundry tomorrow?

(THE POET sighs. THE LOVER turns to him and sees that he isn't drying anything and makes a face. THE POET, with nothing to dry, gestures to the pot and makes the face back. THE LOVER continues scrubbing.)

THE LOVER: And get rid of any leftovers. I'll have the roast from today.

(THE LOVER gets frustrated and finally slams the pot he was scrubbing down in the sink. Some water splashes on the front of his pants which only frustrates him more. THE POET sighs again, then

*slings the towel over his shoulder
and pushes THE LOVER aside and
takes over scrubbing.)*

THE POET: Relax.

THE LOVER: I can't.

THE POET: You can.

*(THE POET looks at him pointedly,
rinses the pot and starts to dry it,
moving back away from the sink.
THE LOVER starts scrubbing a
plate.)*

THE LOVER: But not until we're on the plane—

*(THE POET comes up behind him
and puts his arms around THE
LOVER's chest. THE LOVER
tries to wiggle free, but can't.)*

THE POET: Shhh.

*(THE LOVER starts to cry. THE
POET holds on, kisses the back of
his neck. THE LOVER wipes his
face with his wet hands. THE
POET hands him the towel and
they both laugh, quietly.)*

THE LOVER: What if we can't get a car?

*(THE LOVER sobs harder but
continues scrubbing the dish.)*

THE POET: We'll get a car.

THE LOVER: I know.

*(THE LOVER dries his face with
his shoulder, sniffs a little, contains
himself.)*

THE LOVER: I'm being silly.

*(THE POET kisses his cheek,
reaches up to wipe his face, then
kisses it. He laughs a little.)*

THE POET: You're not.

(THE LOVER pulls away, sniffs again.)

THE POET: You know I love you.

THE LOVER: Shut up.

(THE POET tries to kiss his cheek again, but THE LOVER pushes him away. THE POET tries to turn THE LOVER toward him, but he wrestles. When THE POET wins, THE LOVER shuts his eyes tightly, refuses to look at him. THE POET kisses his nose. THE LOVER frowns.)

THE LOVER: Do you care that you're in love with a sobbing lunatic?

THE POET: Of course I care—in fact, I may prefer it.

(THE LOVER laughs and, opening his eyes, sees that THE POET isn't laughing. He kisses THE POET's nose. End scene. But instead of the lights fading or the curtain falling, the two simply snap out of character, dry their hands, and take their positions in the living room.)

(Another time. The doorbell rings.)

Of course I care. In fact, I may prefer
delight to wing out: the hand that parts ~~the sea~~
the seen:

(THE LOVER answers.)

~~a house of cards~~
a house of carditis: leap back, my cure,
from bottled seed—the answer's in the ~~thanks~~
fear
that it will hold us as long as it likes, then not.

*(THE LOVER introduces THE
POET to their guests.)*

I am a thief: some days I don't look away.
Some days I ~~pace its ground, its closing rooms~~
I write, an offering to quiet
~~its open jaw~~
myself:

*(THE LOVER kisses THE POET's
cheek. THE POET answers.)*

but the rooms grow louder locked—I say
~~love, I say kiss, I say locked room~~
sorrow, I say *later, later*. What I mean is kiss
in a locked room, the sorrow of forgetting you're ~~there~~

*(THE LOVER asks THE POET if
he's listening.)*

here.

~~There's always tomorrow.~~

*(THE POET nods, stands to get
more wine.)*

If I don't look up

*(THE LOVER also stands, begins
to show their guests the apartment.)*

from word or line or stitch,

*(THE LOVER opens the door to
their bedroom, and hundreds of
birds are uncaged. They flood the*

room; the guests stand in place, as if afraid they'll be touched.)

if I don't seem to savor—eye or ear—
don't think its you I've turned from, turning off.

(THE POET walks in from the kitchen.)

The birds, they bank, they scatter from the wolf.

(THE POET howls. THE LOVER gives him space, then panics. Their guests, not knowing what to think, excuse themselves. THE LOVER starts to pace, then walks them out, tries to kiss a cheek, but no. They're gone. THE POET takes a breath, the howls again. The birds refuse to settle or escape entirely. THE LOVER, tethered but angry, returns to the room. He makes a little speech, but it can't be heard. The dog then howls too. The birds turn, surprised. A look: THE POET turns also; all are quiet. The moment allows THE COUPLE to embrace, then kiss—the show must go on—THE LOVER, laughing, howls back. The birds help clear the bed. Lights fade to black.)

The birds, they bank, they scatter from the wolf.

(But when the lights return, THE COUPLE is still at it, though they seem startled that the lights are on.)

You're kind to have come. You're kind to come away.

(THE POET sees, suddenly, beyond the wall.)

And you—the senses took their fill: the proof was charming, really: the sound returned; the clay, it moved within us.

(THE LOVER turns to him, begins to ask what it mean.)

We've rehearsed birdsong in the grass.

(THE POET climbs off the stage and walks, a little blinded from stepping into darkness, up the center aisle. THE LOVER calls for him to come back.)

We've done all they've told us to do, and still this silence, like a child—

(THE POET finds a program on the floor of the theatre, a little crumpled.)

Of course I cried—but you, you laughed until the birds, startled, took their shape— which wasn't as beautiful: the rising scales failed their tremelo: limbs ~~released the weight~~
unmade the nape, the cheek. The kiss, too, swiftly falls—it fails us, our shaking bodies, ~~made hungry for the flock:~~
learning to pretend. Inside, the pantry empties toward an end.

(He hands it up to THE LOVER, but he doesn't understand. THE POET sits in one of the many seats, looks up toward the performance.)

~~Inside, the pantry empties toward an end.~~

*(THE LOVER asks for him to come
back on the stage, but THE POET
just shakes his head.)*

If I could fill you, keep you full. If I
could plead against the ~~breaking wall~~
sturdy roof, the laughter
~~beneath it,~~

*(Some birds follow him out into the
audience. He looks up through
confused tears at his lover.)*

If I could always remind you: ~~sturdy sun,~~
~~sturdy moon~~ sturdy son,
sturdy daughter—

(THE LOVER begs him.)

If I could teach you after-
math, recourse (what of solitude in the lonely earth?)
and learn from you a balanced book, the joys
of peopled space—

*(There is a cracking sound as
beyond the couple the set of the
apartment begins to crumble.)*

the souldier ~~mans his birth~~
draws ~~some blood~~
his gun,
fires; the souldier paces, blames his boyhood
for his wasting ~~it~~
life
it—

(THE POET tries to speak.)

If I could satisfy
every need, always—but then the fear of being all too much,
of our four walls closing in—

*(THE LOVER asks again what it
means.)*

If I ~~could~~
you could read these lines;

if you could try, I would. But the words are a touch
too light, they tickle the ear.

*(THE POET calls him down off the
stage. THE LOVER listens. They
embrace in the center aisle as the
set collapses. The birds surround
them.)*

My ~~hope~~ is spent:
heart

*(THE LOVER pulls them through
the dark, toward a closed door.
When they pass through it, they
realize they're back in their
apartment.)*

Inside, the pantry empties toward an end.

(Fade to black.)

*(Again, the lights rise and again
THE COUPLE stares with surprise
beyond the end of the stage.)*

Inside, the pantry empties.

*(THE POET grabs THE LOVER's
hand and together they come down,
run toward another door.)*

Let's pretend
the ghost is gone: my father takes a bow
and exits.

*(There is a sound, and when they
turn back to the stage, various
characters have entered.)*

Curtain call.

*(The characters line up and bow in
unison. THE COUPLE screams in
horror. The door they reach for is
locked.)*

A hand extends
from elsewhere;

*(Deus ex machina: a rope drops
from above them; they squint up
but can't see anything.)*

God ~~unveils the apparatus~~
reveals himself, then shows us how to.

*(Exit music begins. They kiss, in
fear that something's over.)*

It's still my face; it's still my lips to yours,
but the sweetness is borrowed. The taste is never clear.
How, then, as the stagelights dim, can we be sure
what will happen in full dark? And after? After
that?

*(THE COUPLE climbs back onto
the now-dark stage. They look
through their things, as if to check
what's missing.)*

What of mornings not yet written on the palm?
Good thing I'm not a ~~either~~
diver, have no crowd
to please, no ~~money~~ to make
bodies or mend; no calm
to keep, just silence to disturb. ~~A crown~~
I could

*(THE LOVER sits on the couch,
checks if it's really comfortable.
THE POET goes through the
kitchen draws, decides to make
some dinner.)*

live in this, and do. Most days I take your hand,
Following it toward what I understand.

*(THE POET calls from the kitchen,
asks what he should make. End
scene.)*

(SCENE: *The New York apartment. THE COUPLE has just moved in. Boxes are stacked where furniture will be.*)

To follow love toward what I understand
is to replace our company with more space.

(A siren passes outside.)

I don't need more stuff; I need more time—to plan
more trips, to make more love. But I can't just make
more. I can't wave a wand between our shores
and conjure islands, archipelagos
of need.

(The light begins to change to evening: purples and blues.)

You see, I have to allow for torrents,
light, the occasional flood. It's not what I know
that keeps me looking.

(The sound of someone unlocking a door, but it is coming from a neighboring apartment.)

Love is fine, but common—
show me one life empty of it. What I desire
is more water than rock,

(It grows dark.)

more open seed than set horizon.

(The sound of reggaeton bass rises up from under the floor. Voices come in through the windows.)

You're right: I put my ~~sorrow~~ in the fire;
I ~~call it love and watch what rises up~~
solitude
I ~~give it a name and act like that's enough~~
Loneliness

(THE COUPLE *finally enters, exhausted.* THE POET *walks straight for the bedroom.* THE LOVER *straight to the bathroom.*)

~~I spend the mornings giving it my breath~~

(THE POET closes a window and the apartment is quiet again, except for the bass.)

~~and write all evening, parting with its left.~~

(THE LOVER enters the living room and, hearing the bass, stomps a few times, though not loud enough to really make a point.)

~~patience~~

(THE LOVER sits on a box, asks for some water.)

~~the good child talks to animals, commissions death
so that one day he will die having known the rest.
father~~

(THE POET brings him water. THE LOVER drinks it quickly then gets ready for bed. THE POET goes through the boxes until he finds his something to write with.)

~~brother~~

~~I am the man I feared; I tame my eyes.~~

(THE LOVER stands by the door to their bedroom, waiting for a response. THE POET holds up a finger: wait.)

~~sorrow~~

(THE LOVER rolls his eyes and retreats to the bedroom.)

~~what of it? What of Adam and of Eve?~~

~~sorrow :~~

(THE POET begins to write, but stops. Sighs.)

~~I cast my fear; I make love with the clay.~~

*(He follows into the bedroom,
closes the door behind him. The
sound of the bass quiets as the
stage slowly darkens.)*

I call it sorrow, but who am I to say?

*(The scene plays out indefinitely.
No applause, even from the birds,
already asleep in the audience.)*