

Nativity

I was a garden and you
my gardener. I was a house,
you, my lodger,

lodged beneath my heart.
My Heart, you were the fist that knocked
and knocked and I could not answer.

You starved me down
until a glance could pass right through me
as I lay

on the obstetrician's vinyl couch,
under a shroud
that stank from Clorox.

They mined for you—
their probes slick with
the scentless oils of technicians

for whom I must
be opened, peeled back, forced
to look. And I did, as I was told—

not relax—exactly—but give myself up
to your co-conspirators, who dug you
out of the blankness of my flesh,

parted the dark waters and suddenly,
you came forth
a smudge of white against the ultrasound's

blackness, you floated spectral and thickly
pale, a magnolia floating in a bowl,
an elegant centerpiece. You had no heart,

were as minimal as a Mobius strip.
But you had style. Even your disappearance
was oddly stylish, the way you resembled

more and more a comet,
the wan tail of you grew
longer, more tenuous on the screen.

I saw you, calmly,
and with endearing gravity take a nose dive
until the light blinked out and I was

no longer a house for an uninvited guest,
nor a heaven for a gauzy constellation.
The screen went dark and I came back

to myself. I was no longer a ghost's ghost.
I was myself again. I was flesh. And living.

After three weeks at the museum

I saw the figures of the crucifixion
In personal terms.
Christ naked and asleep, eyes closed—

dead to the world. She is unable to reconcile herself.
The same old story—mind and body—
A marriage on the rocks.

Who killed him? Somehow, she seems implicated,
Simply because he's dead and she is living.
He is already dreaming of the great

Angels of the resurrection.
She suffers without hope.
Her touching misfortune

illuminates these works.
But her lamentation . . .
as though she knew, all along,

she would outlive him.

Plague's Monologue

I erased the world so nothing can find it, snuffed out the roses, red and hot as the snouts of bombs, repealed the polar ice cap, even that fat oxymoron, the “industrial park,” has disappeared. And the last few words huddled together, like bees in a hive buzzing and plotting? I cut their throats with the scythe of a comma, turned the snout of my pen against them. I saved by erasing the streets and the people—let them be overgrown with absence. I don't care—there is no limit to my appetite, my lust, my zeal for emptiness. But I know you—and you hav kept a transcript of the disappearance.

Retrospective Elegy for Charlotte

You were about to sail the Seine.

And I—

wearing one of six frowns I had perfected—

retreated into *The Stranger*:

It is better to burn than disappear.

Camus was dead and the weather was

on fire in Fez

□ □ □

Our 19th summer: the waiter at Le Café Aztec is wearing a hairnet.

We rolled our hair into French knots embalmed in Aqua Net,
shoplifted naughty dresses from Galleries Lafayette

(where you smirked at the toilet seat protectors
for the cleanest asses in town)

and wore lipstick named *Ho Chi Minh Red*.

□ □ □

The moon in those days—damp, white, full
as a cut radish.

And

I was in love with you—Charlotte,

girl named for a dessert

that was named for an empress.

From where you are among the dead

whatever became of—



After awhile

I hauled in the long banners of

the women's wind-blown hair

erased that city—a feverish opal of rain and lamps—

until you were gone.

Adieu, adieu

I wept too much.

Every moon was atrocious.

Every sun was bitter.