



MENDING THE IMPOSSIBLE

by

KRISTINE LYNN BLADE

A THESIS

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APPROVED: *Ralph Salisbury*
Ralph Salisbury

VITA

NAME OF AUTHOR: Kristine Lynn Blade

PLACE OF BIRTH: Mt. Vernon, Washington

DATE OF BIRTH: December 5, 1950

UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

Western Washington State College
Evergreen State College
University of Oregon

DEGREES AWARDED:

Bachelor of Arts, 1975, Evergreen State College

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Modern Poetry
Women in Literature

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

AWARDS AND HONORS:

PUBLICATIONS:

The California Quarterly
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Contents

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Eating a Pomegranate	1
A Meal, A Spell	2
Follow the Leader	3
If I'm Pregnant This Time	4
Closing	5
Your Father in Kansas	6
For Georgia O'Keefe	7
Salmon	8
Approaching a Parallel	9
Thunderstorm	10
For Ethne Who Used to Beat Her Children	11
The Lament of the Liar	12
Stoplights	13
Fable of the Guitar and the Bird	14
Dream While Driving After Discussing the Possibility of Marriage	15
This Will Tell	16
Reconciled	17
Snowdrops	18
Heron	19
For Lloyd's Grandfather	20
Song of the Sea-lion's Body Resting Dead on a Beach	21
At the Family Reunion	22
Why I Couldn't Sleep	23

Offering	24
For Morgan	26
Poem to a Young Drunk Man	27
Through the Mail	28
Language of the Perfect Stone	29
For My Mother	30
After the Loss of Her Leg	

Eating a Pomegranate

Drunk pink pomegranate
Ripe, you fit in my palm
like a small bald monkey's
angry head.
Under my knife
your skull opens.

I dig my way in
and eat what I find
in the bone caverns
of the monkey's ancient jungle.
I fill my mouth with
blood jewels
the sweet sour burst of brainsap.
I spit out the seeds and wait
to evolve backwards.

A Meal, A Spell

My mother, on dangerous holidays
woke with preparations.
Measuring her influence
by teaspoons and cups
she treated the turkey
closer than a child
yet held no grudge.
She tickled and slapped
its sticky back and thighs.
She rubbed it with oil.
Her hands passed over it many times
the same color as bird flesh.

Then she packed its holes
with breadcrumbs
onions and butter,
tied its legs together with string,
and shoved it
into the oven—
that magic box
where heat
changes everything.

If I'm Pregnant This Time

We do so many things alone. Tonight
I drive off to Oregon and you
attend a potluck dinner
where friends ask if we plan
to have children.

You enjoy the party, return home late
but in time for my call.
You crawl into bed with the phone
and I slip out of my clothes
as we talk.
Later, my dreams are rough
on both of us.

If I'm pregnant this time I
want you there for the abortion.
I want you to see the few minutes
we are paying for
to keep my womb clean
and empty.

I want to look into your eyes
as we undo this knot
of cells and
tell it no
again.

Closing

Behind your head
the black town
its hush its streets
its sharp squares of light
leaning out into the water.

Around us
the wood groan the boats
bumping the dock.

This is what scared me—
this peace, finally—
your bare back
more still more warm
more like land
than flesh.

Your Father in Kansas

In a grey
photo from Kansas
there with brothers and wives, your father
is the handsome one
clowning
on the end.

Somebody's hand grabs his arm
lets the rest of him out
like a kite.

In the same picture in another light
you see the family ties
around his neck.
He eyes the picture's edge and knows
about the hand that holds him
how much it can take—

It's a prayer not a joke his white shirt
blowing open
will empty him
into Kansas.

For Georgia O'Keefe

Give her a poppy.
She locates
gravity.

Give her a shell—
she takes it through
a spectrum.

Give her a rock.
Only one will do.
And it may not be
the one you give her.

In a clean desert
she cuts plateau with river
meets land
with air.
Where forms won't merge
she is the crow flying through
carrying the sky
on its back.

Salmon

You are built for this swim
up water, over rock
that turns you ugly—

purpose held close
to the heart
til home
is the signal
that hits your body's
ancient gong.

Then what you are
pours from you—

pink beads roll
on the riverbottom.

Each one holds
like a memory
like a mirror
like a pocketwatch
more
than a sum of parts.

Approaching a Parallel

There is a vacuum
some people call sorrow—
it's always begging
to be filled

There is the undisciplined chord that guides
itself by touch
and there are dangers
that can be inherited:
The danger of courting the pulled-down shade;
the drunk piano with its outburst of rage;
one can seek solace
in the soft-
walled house
and lose all
that is worth protecting.

This is a dangerous time
and perhaps all times
are dangerous—
moving on the edge of the look alike
do alike mother ability
squandered.

All she gave you
sparks and blisters
your lips.
All she missed
conspires
to kiss and comfort you
to absolute silence.

Thunderstorm

I count every white
bite of air—

Counting:
the temperature drops
fast and drastic.

Counting:
hailstones at the windowglass—
fingers like mine
bent on breakage.

Counting
nothing is broken
lightning doesn't hit
but always
always there's the threat.

For Ethne Who
Used to Beat Her Children

If Ethne were a picture
she would be a portrait
of great aunts and grandmothers

gnarled hands hidden in sleeves.
No one would be smiling.
Their long white dresses

would be yellow with the grime
of having waited
so long for somebody
to take the picture down
turn it over

to find on the back
the other picture—

of beautiful hands
holding themselves.

The Lament of the Liar

I am afraid I am lying
again.
On the phone.
In bed. Everyday.
Lies fill me up like helium
and I am a round gidly balloon woman
going up, up.

Perhaps god should send me straight
to a packet of pins
and send my lovers, parents, friends
copies of everything I've said, hidden or written
captioned by what I really thought
what I really did
with whom
where, when
and how good or frankly
awful it was.

But god will probably stay out of it—
let me float about
a satellite
bouncing my slightly twisted communications
to earth
while the hot busy molecules
of my latest misdeeds
practice their art
of geometric increase.

Stoplights

You keep wanting to run them.
They are not rubies.
They are not coals.
They are not fat apples
hung above the city
shining
sputtering.

In dreams you do run them
live what it is
they have been trying forever
to stop:
people dance before your mouth
blood jumps
its tracks. Electricity
is not a cord.
Words join their spaces
lines between dreams become circles—

they include you
they turn red
they shine above the city
like planets
like hearts.

Fable of the Guitar and the Bird

The bird belonged here
before she was split
to nothing.

Through an open window
the guitar invites her back
then yanks her down
by a wing. The bird

bashes about
like a heart—
you can hear her thinking.

She'll have to walk out of here
feathers scraping a path to the door

while the guitar tries
to mend
the impossible.

Dream While Driving After Discussing the
Possibility of Marriage

All the domestic animals stop
in mid-step
to honor
someone's blaring voice

and get a glumpse
of the future
gone
on someone's grinning bumper.

Days gather bodies
indecent little hulks
press like shadow
to the landscape.
Drivers who can't look away
look into eyes
full and empty
as moonrocks and granite.

Each with a star to steer by
paws stretched out
as if leaping
they send out defeat
like an illness
and infect us
all.

This Will Tell

How wide you open
your mouth lets
as much of you out
and as much of me in.
If we exchange tongues
it is money invested
toward a future, rough
and gentle as that.

If we bump teeth our mistakes
will be from clumsiness
near-misses, head-ons.
If one of us bites and the other doesn't
we will know which of us
is to be caged and bitter and which one will be
the recipient, the soother, the trainer.
And which is most hungry
and which is most empty.

And whosoever kisses the cheek
and whosoever kisses the shoulder
and whosoever sucks the fingers of the other—
all this will tell
how much of the other
we will finally be accused
of stealing.

Reconciled

We swim about, casually naked
in love, we like to look at
each other's bodies waving
in refracted light.

Later, we are lying under it all
watching silt drift to
find us
and settle
so fine it hardly seems to matter

until we try to move
and find our bodies have been replaced
by a process we didn't think we
asked for—

each finger each rib frozen
to a century
each failure
more durable than
anything else.

Snowdrops

Before the first frost
you turned the dirt
worked it
dug up rocks
built a boundary.
You planted your dry handful
of heartlike bulbs deeper
than the package said
and left.

In February
2 snowdrops come up—
white-snouted, single-minded
nuns.

Heron

Slow as a heron
I have moved
over people's lives and bodies
using flesh and love
like air
to lift
to slow and glide
to hover
to fall at times.

Now, my arms move
over you.
I can feel you passing beneath me—
a wind of seconds.
I can feel you moving
like a landscape
wide and far below.
I can feel a distance
as I just begin to chart
your presence—
how your body holds you
how you see yourself.

Flying over this countryside
I see as a heron sees—
the contours of the land
how rivers cut and soothe them
how fences from a distance
look trivial and far
how the land is held together
by the ways in which I love it.

For Lloyd's Grandfather

To Lloyd you have always been
the things you've built
and lived on: Rockhouse
at Samish Island
its dark wood walls and stone fireplace.
The boat
tended daily 20 years, moored forever
but for its single halting journey
test run maiden voyage final passage
up the Samish River.

One day Lloyd says he must see you
because of a dream
or a feeling.
He drives us all morning
to an afternoon
cool for summer.
You can't hear too well
but from your stonehouse
you speak what you see—
sailboats and birds on this good day
cutting across their bays of light.

Later in winter you give away your boat.
Lloyd feeds you
your hospital dinner.
When you ask he says yes
your eyes
are clear.
You thank him and
look elsewhere
content that he knows
how you mean it.

Song of the
Sea-lion's Body Resting Dead
on a Beach

I lie here a mystery
a dog's sleep.
My flippers are gentle
as old shoes.

I lie on my belly
that place where my
natural enemies
aimed.
Though I am fooling you
I am not fooling myself.

They have hit
and hit me
with blunt greed—
Their god teeth
clamping shut
on the world
of my flesh.

My eyelids lock
on a black sea.
My ghost ascends
tight architectures
of rock
without me.

I wait here
for water to come in
go out with my face
take apart
the last piece
of my skin
heal the last split
between how I seem
and what I am.

At
the Family Reunion

Your aunts stagger under armloads
of potato salad and paper plates.
Your uncles
drink lunch.
You are the first one given
the ski and the rope.

When Uncle Al guns it wide open
you rise
water peeling away

to reveal the man
they had hoped for. The applause
is for those shoulders—

the hint of a paunch
undiscernible

as you
cut
the lake.

Why I Couldn't Sleep

Once we know
how men and women make love
we can imitate them.
I look at your face
run my hand across your chest.
In the middle of everything I think
of how you
play piano.
Piano heart hand. It must be
strange to hear
someone think of you as:
In another room I can hear
him breathing.

Lately you have mentioned
the return of some strange pulse
to your thoughts.
I think this is why you go to sleep and
why I can't.
It is the blood of this moment
resolving itself
in the next—and the next
like your father's death
the memory becoming
the event.

You were falling asleep.
I got up.
Not some voice from the street.
Nobody said it
but I thought it

Jim, the days are arriving
in our hands
in our lovemaking.
I will get up
you will sleep and the moon
will carve squares
on the floor.

Offering

Glass-heavy, intricate
this offering is like
a goblet
passed from hand to hand
an heirloom from our parents
what they paid, what they got.
They would fill a dish
with afterdinner mints
and set it on a table by the couch—
their fingers fumbling through
absent minded Sundays
never quite finishing them off.

Perhaps it's time for our selfishness
to give way.
Think of the old woman, the pioneer
whose communal sense ends a journey
at its rightful time.
She works her garden for the good of all—
if it's dry, if it's rich
always capable of growing fruit.
A momentum of trying
and failing doesn't
stop her.

In the present country suburbs
young men and women
make plans
for a solar greenhouse
attend potluck dinners 2 by 2
own a few sensible acres.
Recipes and hammers
passed along and
borrowed. The bitterness
of couples married or not
a drop leaks out during dessert
and everyone knows that taste.

Reaching 30 one gets a different
a frightened sense
of humor
where, after the meal
you settle back
into the fat armed chair
with the joke that makes it
all more possible.

At a time when I want this I'm sleeping less
and with someone else. Facts
lie down with folkmyths.

I cross states
thin, blue, indelible, wired.
I wish I were more of a threat
to the family as we know it.

I wish I could make
something more than
a vow where
the only measure of its beauty
is its age
in the face of a propensity
to break.

For Morgan
—murdered at her home in Olympia, Washington
March 5, 1979

I live
alone. I need a gun,
Morgan, there is no
other way.
Who knows how he got there?
He always gets there.
Who cares what we wear?
It always comes off.

I know how to use a kitchen knife.
Would it peel
black rinds off night?
Or whittle
to nothing
his ivory face?
Whose ivory, Morgan
his thighbone or yours or mine
to make the lover's
shrill flute?

He might lean close
as mother to baby
breathing
tending me
with the intimacy
of his bright skill.
Listen to me Morgan
You are nothing
but a word, a synonym
imperative for
I need you
to hold it, aim it
be ready for him
forever, Morgan
for he is with us
though we can't believe it
falling everywhere at once.

Poem to a Young Drunk Man

You crash from the bar to your knees
and, mid-street, praise a streetlight
and your girlfriend to a passing car.

Later you will threaten to punch her face in.
But now your voice
is a drum
a parade

a black feather
with no rainbow, no memory
just yelling
you are so fucked-up and
still your own man.

Through the Mail

With you it will have to be
a relationship through the mail.
Postmen as blue-suited mid-wives to
our clean, crisp linear babies.

Inside envelopes
ink will curl—
dark blue veins.
Pulses will bean in the folds
quiet as baby mice.

Once a week
messages will be exchanged.
Better than real babies
they'll never mature
to mirror or taunt us.

With you it will be safe
over distance
aided by the unaware marsupial mailmen
whose leather shoulder bags
will carry our meanings for us
taking them much farther
than we
care to take them ourselves.

Language of the
Perfect Stone

Perhaps it's what we think we have
that forces us
up and down broken beaches
to look for a stone
that brilliantly and simply
says the day.

We know well enough
when we shine the stone
and put it in a jar with other stones
it should not say a thing.

For My Mother
After the Loss of Her Leg

This year you are 70
and an artificial leg
leans against a chair.
You use it only
when you have to—
bent over your walker
you take tiny baby steps.

When we wheeled you from the hospital
it wasn't the mountainous stairs
the impossible inclines or
distances greater
than an arm's reach.
It wasn't yet
other people's glances.

It was the warm smell of pavement
June lawns, azaleas
and above town, the blue hills
not seen since March—

the country you'd be reclaiming
bit by bit everyday
for the rest of your life.

Cori Taggart