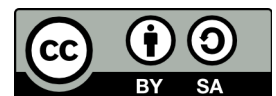


Rachel West's
30 Poems
April 2022



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04/01/22

Something

I've never mastered: that maybe
if it can't be instructive
make it look effortless at least?

but I have been bullying the words I read
mercilessly these days!

Every lie feels like a gut punch
to one who has never told the truth herself.

I once rested on my consistency
but now recognize the impossibility
of what I demand of others:

I cannot offer
gentleness and truth
in the same breath--

not because it can't be done, my friends--

more like I should have learned
a martial art
instead of writing;

that's liberal education for you.

What vanity to treat words as toys
to believe they can be so easily
and harmlessly used,

when a reference to bread--
which I am baking today--

bears with it the embodied struggle
of generations.

Who told me I should stand here
with a big proud smile
acting like it came from my kitchen
and means nothing?

I feel like a chump, to be quite honest,
and I want you to be shocked, but

I think I've been underestimating my audience
, assuming they're all as dumb as me.

I'm going to title every poem "Art"
this year. Lean in.

04/02/22

I feel happier after seeing your face
and watering the plants

The sonar comes back
later and later, otherwise

As you and I descend
into intimacy until it becomes solitude again

One craft, who knows
how many souls

04/03/22

Today I drew a picture
of a woman being lifted
onto a barstool.

Today we walked around Holmes Lake
and made plans
and heard the call of
red-winged blackbirds

all perched in trees under
cloud like wet paper.

So close, so many birds,
ink-sharp shadows pierced
with their own red.

04/04/22

some extraction
of my angelhood

the material
cannot tell you
how to use it

these are the gruesome
delights of my heart

opened like fruit; take

the little pieces
between your fingers

and tell me
what I am

04/05/22

Someone in a dream
said "aren't we impressed
with one another?" while
working a seeming puzzle
of barbell piercings,
some rather phallic
in appearance.

I grow asymmetrical
eyebrows
and call it magic.

Bonus: Excerpt from rpg character backstory fiction

"Is that really all you have?" said David as Alaun set down the final box, bringing the total to three. "You can bring it all. It's no trouble, I promise. I've got room."

"So you said, and so I did. This is everything." Alaun dropped his backpack on the floor next to the boxes and collapsed on David's couch. "I thought I'd been in one place so long I'd never extricate myself, but apparently it didn't amount to much at all."

There was silence for a moment, a silence that was rare in Alaun's presence and only fell when he was particularly exhausted. All this David knew, and it made him feel frozen, at a loss. He sat down on the couch with his elbows on his knees. Alaun drew his body inwards and away, uninvitingly; David resisted the urge to reach out.

"I, uh, started a night cooking class," he said after a moment. Alaun huffed a laugh.

"So that means you're going, I take it?"

"No... It means I'm going to cook you dinner."

"Oh." Alaun sat up and finally turned to him. "David, you don't have to... Not for me."

David laughed. "You're the only one who calls me that. Is it a British thing?"

"Fuck, I'm sorry. Dave--"

"No, I like it."

Alaun smiled at him, sadly at first, then seemingly lost in a scrutiny that was almost cold; 'the lie detector,' Chris used to call it, somewhat ironically...

"Was he home? Chris, I mean," David said, hoping to break the spell.

Alaun's face fell into a sour sneer. "Yes," he sighed. "And I'm more convinced than ever that he's planning to report me to some white collar American crime watch for stealing from him. You know me, David; would I do that? Never. I still can't believe it's ending this way. Lucky I've got you or I'd be out in the street. You didn't tell anyone, did you?"

"No, but, Chris is gonna know you're here. Sooner or later. Look, I'm sure he's not going to do anything; he's not innocent in all this, either."

"All the more reason to sacrifice me."

"You're just being paranoid. Take a break. Lay off the coke for a few days."

"Can't fucking afford it, mate."

"Well, I can," David laughed.

"Guess that makes you my drug dealer as well as my landlord. Dear me, what a predicament." Alaun smiled at him, in that way he had, playing David's nerves like a stringed instrument.

04/06/22

Like the rising forms
maple, dogwood, ash,
all of which must dress
and undress
the same way, year by year--
I wonder, have I any choice
in how I must appear?

04/07/22

let's face it
this is just a document
of decline

or of change
waking up to a life
without poetry

a life filled with
so many more exciting things

they'll kill you for this anyway
if you wake up to a life

chasing metal battallions toward
a stockpile of the last remaining truth

they never took it, no--
it never ended, the war--

waking up to a world in progress
where every moment mattered
and not because they said you might vote

where you were handed off like a sack of grain

and whoever carried it
kept running
toward the stockpile

what are your instructions?
what are your orders?

04/08/22

Every day I spend time on something
That to me is beautiful
But it's rarely a poem

Today I tried making a perfect loop
Of a song with pan flute

I might forget to notice things

My body is running slow in fast motion
Here and there, what is it gathering

Looking inside a building
To see if something lights up, says

My ego could ornament itself
Specifically among these fixtures

Change of scene would be nice
Curtain rising on a new eponym

04/09/22

Living, reading-- Sure.
Tasting berries like memories,
imagining new ones,
even under the slate and shale.

Weather, dog paws,
a little stack of polaroids--

These are the things you tell no one,
forget to process
except in the body.

When the path branches,
there's the long way
there's the steep way,

and there is also
the option to just
stand there.

04/10/22

Lunes

Warm kitchen, a
spiral-cut surface of bread
centers this morning.

I turned the
spider plant to face the
sun another way.

Slow growth; the
cuttings float in water, waiting,
like me, perhaps.

The bread has
also come up short, though
butter mends all.

04/11/22

there is a small bus station
in my heart-- I am no one's
garden, but

this could be a permanent home
of sorts.

who cares why it was built, or
who decreed what dimensions it should have?
who said you can't do drugs here?

4/12/22

a breath
bloomed spring
as if for the last time
or the first

dark to light
dark to light

04/13/22

Lune

Blinds drawn against
yellow sky-- how terrible, how
beautiful is change

04/14/22

Character design
I'm open to ideas
I'd even buy something
If it fits

How much for a real summer?
How much, dammit?

I've been writing instead
Of everything
Unboxing my memories
With different hands

04/15/22

only kind people
have ever frightened me

or maybe it's been
my propensity to swallow myself whole
for love

to deny myself the joy
of combat
of firm outlines and refusals

ever since I left you behind
because our company was acid

and I wished to become lovable
to grow feet and walk on land, goodbye

04/16/22

The question is: Novelty.
In the stone age,
people were high all the time.
Nothing was ever not novel.
Every day a new discovery
cracked existence wide open
to bright new horizons
of awareness. Today,
(through fluoridation, perhaps?)
the human brain is calcified, so that
novel stimuli, which are plentiful
in the environment, are blocked
from perception. This reduces
distraction, making the human
suitable for repetitive, useless work.
Discovery is a trademark, not
the purview of common animals
anymore. I have to say this
because it is impossible to say.
I am attempting
to descale
my brain. Please pardon our dust.

04/17/22

(On Mom's Birthday)

Today I can feel it, suddenly;
like an old beast in the mud
I rise up and start to move.

This place is, perhaps, safe
if only for a moment;
the air is like a blanket.
It is blessedly dark.

There are sweet roots
to dig and long, long rows,
all day, the temperature
is just right. Long lines
trailing through the mud.
It snows! No one is around.

On and on. Memories start to come
but there's no rush. Maybe
death will be like this.
I don't have to chase.
I am made of ink.
All my love discharged,
my sap bright as power.

I will be an elder thing.
I will know and I will tell you
in long slow forever, illuminated,
technique lost to time.
I will go that slowly
and there is no malediction
in these floating sheets.

Those who came before
practiced calligraphy. They gave me
everything but their pens.
Here are the cosmic instructions.
Here is a distant childhood.
Start roaming.
Don't look back.
The grain is a warp and weft
full of time traps;

keep to your element.
You have always been here.
You have a feast to join.
Walk, giant.
Believe it or not,
this is joy.

04/18/22

the meaning of a map
is secondary to its beauty.

this is an innocent belief
and please forgive me these delights

as the world grows harsher
and I am left in awe

at its completeness:
its spires, sinkholes, spines,

its bent-at-the-knee bolted benches,
its loops and out-of-order hotlines.

04/19/22

Lune

wind comes stronger
as I turn onto 14th,
walking without purpose.

Happy 04/20, Comrades

Hormones. Cyan, magenta, yellow.
Last year, my friends, in the summer.

Meet me there. Under a blanket
of money. Under a movable feast of stars.

It's raining today, an epic supergroup
of aesthetic movements. I feel myself

decked out in historical context
like a Christmas tree.

I love you, I say
to each little owie.

And you: I love you, too.

04/21/22

I was the thing itself, the empty thing,
caught up in the shimmer of silver
on the water.

With all the stones in the sea, ah,
to know that each one must be moved.

There is neither beginning nor end
to this task.

And yet the current does not hesitate.

04/22/22

stop
looming like a
sinkful of dishes.

stop looping
like a sinkful
of fishes.

we are all living
a vagabond life

4/23/22

This discipline
of air and light
that underpins
our maneuvers: it is
an inflection
you will catch, occasionally;
in my speech;
in your dreams.
I can't explain where
I picked it up,
and why it comes and goes
the way it does.
I can hammer it flat and polish it
like gold, paper thin, but for what?
Capture! Oh--! Like an insect
that used to be common.
Held in a pocket
of shadow, it renders
its own brilliance.

04/24/22

A statue in bronze
of a woman in a doorway.

A statue in bronze,
in Amsterdam.

A statue in bronze,
hands on her hips,
leg extended,
contrapposto, on heels.

She turns her chin up slightly,
her gaze a long, low angle
of elevation.

Streets. Rooftops. Sky. All of us.
She smiles.

04/25/22

when I hear your poetry
I'm afraid you'll lie
you'll disbelieve
you'll conceal the facts
of our deaths

you'll refuse to know
what's happening
you'll be part of that
mowing down force
that relentlessly
mows down
that relentlessly
shrugs about it

but (?)
every academic
is you, and I love you

what people
think poetry is for, now

they're right
and it's terrifying
like noticing history
(science)

when something does
when it does
my heart exclaims
like a little monkey

I can't be patient
I can't not talk back
it's like I haven't
seen you in years

offering me poetry
like the dish of the day
like water of life
like it's common

as it once was

04/26/22

cast my mind
backward,
forward, x's
for faces, guesses,
that's all
we have

if you can't even
outdo yourself,
can't keep up
with that,
why worry
about the rest

if I were
really here
just me
and this room
were all of it

the only reasonable
answer is:
play on

04/27/22

I woke up
in alarm
because of the wind

The things I don't say
stand like a barrier to sleep

Every time I build
a fortress, I get trapped inside
and I do not like its comforts

Will I feel beautiful again?

In fact, I do
I sweep back my hair
and take off all my clothes

or I cover myself with a screen
and act in shadows

04/28/22

it was only yesterday,
but I didn't think to look.
scout backwards.
the room was blue.

a signature age, that one.
funny to know everyone's probably
stuck somewhere
in the past, replaying old tapes.

why did they let me have
the one room with an ensuite bath
in the house with no heat?

what shampoo did I use
every single morning
when I was too sleepy to hear
the phone from the future

ringing?

04/29/22

maybe
you don't have to
be sure, if you're not.

let it go,
let it come,

pretend it's an anime,
a really good one.

your own window
on a rainy night
is as noir as any other.

learn to love
by any means necessary.

04/30/22

It feels important to be
as close to the sun as possible,

in these quiet days.

I will keep going.

I will embarrass myself.

I will write the date on my leg
and bare it, a sign of the times.

I want to be something
before the end, that's all;

such desires bring forth
luminous monsters.

You know there's no me without you;

I am always showing off,
making fires
you didn't ask for,

getting odd ideas while half-
asleep, under this pear tree.