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**Crow / Francis Bacon's / The Blind Birdwatcher /  
Don't Bend Over / Dornen / Fun and Games /  
What's Left / Bindi / The Second Coming /  
Intimates**

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**Crow**

black dot black dots, spotting  
pebbles dislodged from the macadam  
running the other way  
hands in front of my face  
to protect from Corvid onslaught  
I know they know me  
recognize me  
have done one of their members ill  
something with a hose, I think  
a harsh onslaught of water  
the fierce stream hissing like bullets from a gun  
and this is the repayment  
as I return home from laser eye surgery  
corvus cunning  
they can master tools  
what have I left out in my back yard?  
not the hoe, oh, not the shovel!  
the nozzle grows wings

*m m m*

a sudden sweep out of the corner of the eye *m mmm*  
a flock of “m” birds *m m m*  
crows? an elongated wing span  
as if in the drawing of a child

I think of Ted Hughes’ *Crow* poems  
is this “Crow Tyrannosaurus”?  
primeval, it wants to become more and bigger  
hulk lurking into recognition?  
is this “A Disaster”?  
the spreading oozing lamprey body  
vindictiveness cleverness  
streaking through the retina  
a close-up of all black  
black as purity  
black as death  
what omen?  
crow, perhaps raven  
a large wing  
a midnight winging of crows  
sheeting down  
crow, trickster god

not a murder but an ague  
a plague of crows

or

sweet cease  
a restful primed gesso black canvas  
ready so ready  
awaiting the light

not just the *Crow* poems after all  
a conjurer’s trick  
behind the ear

coming from the back of my brain  
opposite movement of “The Thought Fox”  
violently malevolently  
the eye eye eye becomes  
its own hot dark panting muse

**Francis Bacon's**  
*Three Studies for Figures*  
*at the Base of a Crucifixion*

triptych  
elongated necks and limbs  
having eaten and drunk too much  
like a perverted Alice  
X-rated Tenniel pieces  
disembodied  
not one has eyes  
one is blindfolded  
what's beneath?

bend sinister synecdoche  
piece of tail  
tail of piece  
misogynist, misanthrope  
equal opportunity hater  
nihilist existential gloom  
blindness

for protection?  
can't see the horror?  
or is it punishment itself?  
the sightlessness  
a crucifixion

rows of teeth and open mouths  
where the eyes should be

the frantic malevolent teeth of his screaming popes  
as if the world is something to be consumed  
and voraciously  
predator predator  
ingress egress

impacted wisdom tooth  
wicked incisor  
uvula trembling like a constricted eye  
clarion calling all  
down the fanged esophageal tunnel  
Alice forever falling  
dark constricting dark  
to the beguiling ranks of blood-leached blindness  
all fall

## The Blind Birdwatcher

he trolls woods parks meadows  
for a startle of song

each unseen colour  
emerald magenta sunrise yellow  
their sibilant plumage  
the lemon pucker of flight

the brain's neurons fire  
along the slow tunnel of the dormant optic nerve  
like water buckets hand to hand  
a frisson of sound

bird song he sees  
and vividly in the mind's eye  
birding by ear

stumbles over roots for a nuthatch  
a pileated woodpecker  
feels the cadence of a hummingbird's quick wings

several feeders in his backyard  
well away from threatening windows  
peels three bananas  
smells their sticky sweetness in the feeder  
hears the tortured wings of fruit flies  
who cannot believe their luck  
the soft swish of their wings  
even softer than the hummingbirds'  
protein in their feeding on the fruit flies  
bloated with sweet and savoury submission  
higher in the food chain  
small and smaller still

buys unshelled peanuts by the kilo  
the taste of peanut on his tongue  
makes specialty blends of suet and feed

marvel:  
Black-Capped Chickadee  
Sharp-Shinned Hawk  
Double-Crested Cormorant  
even the names are musical

so ordinary but still his favourite  
a Steller's jay  
a cunning thief  
punked out bird  
electric blue  
with a black Mohawk  
beak bulging  
its nut-brown proboscis  
cartoon of the thieved nut  
sports a Mick Jagger swagger  
sound, a frayed amplifier on fry  
the blind bird watcher flaunts a similar haircut

he feels the birds' footprints on the railing  
after the bird bath  
steps so close  
he gets feathered in the spray

their sounds like tiddly winks caught up  
in his eye's cup

birds can't taste the hot pepper in purchased feed  
no such sense receptors  
squirrels can, repellent  
just rats with pretty tails, dirty

at Maplewood Mudflats  
he snacks on the pellets  
believes you are what you eat  
winces at the searing pain  
has not yet become bird himself

he can feel the murder of crows blotting out the sky  
an eclipse he senses in his body  
the thwack as the bird hits  
the Nature House's window  
eerie silence heightens  
the elegiac wailing choir of its compatriots  
stumbling, he toes the small corpse  
the dead bird like a sandbag with tied-on feet

the body in his knapsack  
along with his wax-papered sandwich  
far too busy to eat  
a dignified burial later in his backyard  
garden trowel and a flower bulb on top for new life

dawn chorus  
evening chorus  
the parentheses of his day  
so full of

now, at the bird sanctuary  
on the white board  
he traces the magic-marker letters  
of the birds sighted that month  
grins at the pun  
and hears each song  
the letters thrum to life, leaping, rustling, flapping

though he prefers to birdwatch alone  
sometimes he goes with his sighted friend

—he hears more; his partner sees more—  
it's like an equation or a musical composition  
birdwatching sharpens the mind  
good for the body, the soul

he watches birds with his heart and brain  
also his ears and tongue  
fingers nostrils  
even his penis though it's not perverse  
much less perverted  
an involuntary stiffening  
like a wet dream  
when a song always beautiful  
is more than usually so  
a thrum  
a recognition of wonder  
of small beauty almost divine  
some might cry

the Organization of Blind Bird Watchers  
he is head of his chapter  
the paperwork pains him  
but he is conscientious, passionate  
this, too, part of his life list

there are deaf bird watchers, too  
he is going to meet the local branch now  
When they go out after for coffee  
their fingers will move like the flights of small birds  
and he will listen to the faint slaps and thwacks  
smile at the sounds  
as identifiable  
as arresting  
as any unsung songbird's

## Don't Bend Over

the old joke about the soap in the shower  
but I'm not allowed to shower anyhow  
no shampoo for three days  
smell like chicken manure  
dream of Herbal Essence  
the green fields, misty meadowy  
Vaseline on the lens

I unpack Easter decorations  
look straight ahead  
box on table  
do squats to chin level  
let the packing paper fall to the floor  
don't look down!  
don't want my new implant to slip out  
hold bunnies and eggs and egg cups in front of me to see  
the peachy artificial grass of the coops so cute

eggs the same shape as illustrations of a myopic eyeball  
dotted lines show where the shafts of light meet  
in front of the retina  
no longer orb but as elliptical as an egg  
representational, but still

eye cups for washing  
—a teeny bird bath!  
such delighted splashing  
with its miniature wings  
though right now I can have none of that  
as gritty as my eye feels—  
and egg cups so similar  
though mine are less utilitarian, prettier,  
all floral curvature and spring-like colours

one falls on the floor  
if I aim just right  
I could have a hole in one!  
don't think on that!  
look up! look up!

it's the season of rebirth  
not all grass is pink and plastic  
what visions will hatch from my new eye?  
a small cheep  
the rustle of fissured ice, out of season  
the sound of squawking  
fierce enragement  
my eye cracks open

ugly duckling  
beautiful swan  
rooster caruncle  
gizzard  
avian flu viruses  
the floor beneath me cackles to life  
pecks at my ankles  
a feathery fleshy swish  
I'm too afraid to look down

## Dornen

raindrops in triplicate  
political imbroglio  
my simple Courier font has become Gothic  
letters like an unset jelly

reading writing both lost in translation

thorns reflections silhouette shadows  
all at once  
Hazard a guess  
translation is everywhere  
even in my muttersprache!

In *The Bell Jar* when Esther went crazy  
she couldn't read  
letters grew "barbs and rams' horns"  
Rams Horner Widerhaken  
but James Joyce is always impenetrable  
and German a rusty chain link fence Kudzu tall  
barbed wire above

Maybe it's not in my eyes  
but in my head?  
Stacheldraht?

Plath honeymooned in Benidorm  
Did Joyce ever visit Santorini?  
I can't read what Google claims

Sporting antlers like elk  
surly mountain goats  
walk on black lava cliffs  
far above me  
in the swirling eddies

or are they pack ponies with tie-on antlers?  
intractable bleating  
cheating? deleting?

I flail and flounder  
they mock me  
as I wait and wait some more  
warten ausbrechen  
for my volcano to erupt

## Fun and Games

makeshift  
plump chair as for chemo drips  
warehouse for abandoned furniture  
desk cornea-curved

this waiting room needs more than  
a re-face to bring it up to speed  
Renovate!

Let's rock and roll, the O. R. nurse says  
squeezing eye drop after eye drop  
*there's a party hat in your lap when ready*  
ready for what?  
I think of conical paper hats  
bright Crayola colours  
kiddy birthdays  
presents desired and unwanted  
New Year's Eve celebrations  
inebriation, pursuit and capture  
midnight kisses  
eyes wide open

it's all good fun and games until someone cries

but it looks more like a shower cap  
to keep out the reno's dust  
maybe it's happening earlier than I think  
the sedative is taking effect  
wheeee!  
a buzz saw in the background?  
or is that a chop saw?  
can't shower or shampoo for three days  
no water in the eye  
surely the tears won't be that big

this is all my protection?

it's all fun and games until someone loses an eye

dimly, a parade of Stepford patients post-surgery shuffle  
careful not to look down  
leis that look like nooses  
a conga line of party hats, noisemakers, blowouts  
only the O. R. nurses and doctors kick extra high  
their laughter balloons up and up  
suspended, a hush, an intake of breath

suddenly the ball drops  
the door slides shut on the lingering patient  
last in the line  
it darkens  
serpentine streamers  
siren song  
an abandoned lei, not mine?

Ready or not, here I come

fuck, it's all fun and games until someone dies

## What's Left

myopic child  
so close to the chalkboard she might have been velcroed  
white on black so hard to see  
but see and read and write and do she must

coke-bottle glasses and then contacts

years pass  
she looks  
intently  
wilfully  
longingly  
hopefully  
at the world, at its wonders  
throws herself into dance, hiking, birdwatching  
leaps into marriage, into parenthood

then ALS entombs her  
a slow weakening, melting

now the only muscles left are in her eyes  
she looks at letters on the board  
spells out

i

love

u

## Bindi

before follow-up laser surgery  
a stick-on yellow plastic dot on one cheek  
to make clear  
at which eye the surgeon should  
aim his laser ray  
blasting the monsters of scar tissue  
so that there won't be a never event  
a video game, low art

the lone dot like slippage  
an out-of-place bindi  
a fallen coloured tear  
a faltering third eye  
displaced  
chakra not sure where to go  
oscillating aura  
mysticism on the move

around the periphery of the eye clinic  
in a slow-moving meditative trance  
we walk  
marked, dilated, we of the pineal eyes  
waiting waiting for the surgeon god  
whose hand and word are wisdom  
what will spill into our too-open pupils?  
enter our torpid brains?

we are a tribe set apart from normal routine  
the quotidian is beyond these walls  
though it seems as if we have been here forever  
so long that we'll need to get another  
referral from our family doctors  
or a walk-in clinic for **this** appointment

ritual, repetition  
perception, hubris, injustice  
the eye clinic now a special satellite of the VAG  
we will soon become a new Bharti Kher performance art piece  
our affliction high art

## The Second Coming

to avoid marking  
stacks of incomprehensible poetry analyses  
sullied student logic like hieroglyphics  
Yeats' rough beast as a celebrity rocker  
I'd joked about what a rough ride his Mary would have  
as he slouched into the holy city

I'll get some cleaning done  
floors washed and waxed  
pet hair sucked up  
dishes dried and shelved  
surfaces immaculate

now what?

in my absence  
the paper piles have grown to a teetering height  
so I mop myself into a corner of the bathroom  
housework to bodywork

clean it up

what might be found in the hidden recesses of my body?  
drug runners cross borders with drugs in rectums, vaginas  
like so many Benwa balls but probably not as titillating

fornix fun fact,  
this from a spectacularly weak student,  
prostitutes used to ply their trade under the arches  
of Ancient Rome  
the question: fornicate in your vault or mine?

I try to turn myself inside out  
but it's a chore and a bore

the hand mirror a too-teeny speculum  
not much bigger than a Q-tip  
and no chance of hitting my G-spot

cakes of earwax plucked  
look like floating candles wickless, witless  
I really should be getting back to work  
but what might be wrested from my nose with a finger?  
circlets of gold?  
the lost scrolls of Ancient Somebody-or-other?  
maybe an essay that reveals Somesense?  
(I should be so lucky)

while examining a wrinkle  
I pull down my lower left eyelid  
some woman had 27 contact lenses hidden in hers  
not urban myth—  
I've seen the pictures!

wrinkled dingbat, her deep-set eyes  
like treasure chests  
pirate fortune  
17 lenses, 17!  
becoming a thin pearl  
mucous shielding the irritant, its shimmer coating  
a gem, a halo

I'm vigilant about good lens hygiene  
but what the hell  
I excavate my left fornix ... and find  
—I'm as surprised as anyone when out fall—  
two turtle doves  
four calling birds  
and a partridge resembling a falcon  
in a desiccated all too-familiar pear tree  
which scratches and burns a little  
as it exits

I have to back away from the sink  
the bathroom is crowded!  
all those wretched birds in the Jacuzzi tub  
too loud for a solitary Tuesday afternoon  
Christmas yet months away  
so this cache is from last year?

if this is the secular, where's the sacred?  
will frankincense, magi, and a baby Jesus  
plummet from the right eye?  
That rocking cradle will have awfully pointy corners

Well, I'd rather leave something for tomorrow  
wait on the advent  
everyone needs someone to love  
something worthwhile to do and  
something to look forward to

so I'll put the cotton balls away  
go back to my marking  
surprisingly refreshed and weightless  
if it weren't for all the squawking  
the gnashing of beaks  
and the unsanitary, slippery  
bird droppings  
that I really should clean up

goose grease as lubricant  
a fornix is as a fornix does  
maybe the Immaculate Conception  
was through not the ear but the eye?

suddenly the disturbing flutter of wings  
how big is that bird?  
oh, Geez, a ministering angel?  
not the dawn of a new-fangled Gabriel  
blethering about another Annunciation

Yeats clearly a little off  
with the timing of “The Second Coming”

though I doubt it will do much good  
—egress, ingress, don’t you know—  
I step away from the sink  
make an emergency rain hat of a small clutch of essays  
double-lock the bathroom door  
avert my eyes from the too-yielding expansive mirror  
my face leonine, hooded

close my eyes tight tight  
turn out the light  
and pray

## Intimates

at the eye doctor's no stirrups and speculum  
no probing pink canals and narrow cavities  
no thin fishy leakage  
but a deeper intimacy

she stares into my inner orbits  
curvature of each retina  
orbs' hydrostatic equilibrium  
back of my brain  
a planetary pull  
getting close to the soul  
her Ekleburg eye looms  
aperture

she commands  
my eyeballs move as the hands of a clock  
look to three o'clock  
six o'clock  
eleven o'clock  
what time is it, Mr. Wolf?  
oh, grandmother, what big eyes you have!  
putting me through a long day  
I've been in this chair forever  
soon into the seasons  
don't want to lose an hour  
will I see better if I gain one?  
daylight savings time?  
I struggle to remain stationary  
compliant

for today's children  
analogue as ancient as Sanskrit  
what does she bark to them?  
I recall a Beverly Cleary story

mother tells Ramona to leave home  
at quarter after eight  
She knows a quarter is twenty-five cents  
so she leaves at 8:25  
doesn't understand how she can be late for school  
runs and runs but can't catch up

sure don't want that kind of miscommunication  
when the cataract surgeon marks my eye  
for implant placement  
six o'clock, he says and marks below my iris  
six? is that a.m. or p.m.?  
time for a drink?  
it's cocktail hour somewhere

don't fuck up  
don't want my eye to be a cinematographic photograph  
no camera obscura for me  
how obsolete is that?  
no aqueous humour leaking through a pinhole  
like a blown-out Easter egg  
my vision like a Jeff Wall lightbox  
do not desire to stand on my head to see everything  
my life unfolding as a photo-conceptual performance piece

is Pluto even registered as a planet anymore?  
things can change in the blink of an eye  
don't blink!  
my eye jerks into readiness—fuck!  
Spring back!  
Fall forward!

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