

A forgery is impossible when we have no model to forge after.

H. P. Blavatsky *Isis Unveiled*

But there is no such thing as secrecy.

Theodor Fontane *Effi Briest*

It is not a matter of words for things. Rather it is a matter of  
distance between the word and the thing.

Nathalie Stephens *Touch to Affliction*

## SESSION

Orchids, a man who breeds orchids (Faulkner's pet hate,  
their hoary throats and stick-insect limbs unnerving harbingers,  
*Nasty things* he wrote, in bed, tingly with bursitis and drink.  
*Their flesh is too much like the flesh of men,*  
*and their perfume has the rotten sweetness of corruption*) if only that.

So, he parents orchids, my latest psychiatrist,  
and watercolours, by the metre so many beach fronts,  
fir groves, rose gold maples, whirling brooks and blotch flowers.  
An outdoorsman, hobby artist unoriginal but energetic  
(already, my critic voice, already five minutes past the office door)  
and so, too, his body a recap  
of all the top muscle groups of the nineties – the baseball bicep,  
the cleft chest, shoulders like whale backs and a teen waist  
tucked into purple and yellow plaid –  
Easter colours in September (*stop it stop it stop it*).

Because he knows my type, my talents, he begins with rules  
(we critics love rules, and are all bottoms): I must not be late, not cancel,  
not lie, expect, begrudge, sour, shirk,  
disrespect the process, steal the magazines, pick the flowers,  
wear muddy shoes, treat him like a friend.



## SESSION

*Good material*, he snicks (because I write, my stolen baby nights, bedtimes robbed by Dad – who knocked on walls, the ghost tapper, and cried over westerns, *Roots* and two wars he never fought, played magus with paper pyramids, telescopes trained to Martian highways, feared white sugar – are now metaphor, *only metaphor* games of match and mend to the doctor). *Good material*, he grins.

Not sores, not slits, not lead in my blood.  
Not turned limbs set with pipe cleaners, not scabs,  
heart spurs, ticks, kinks, the way I walk but blessings  
full of iron and plot twists burnt sweets, these memories,  
strong black coal for the censer and ...

*The best possible start*, he smiles,

shaking my hand and his head at the door.

## SESSION

In his waiting room, wet jasmine in goldfish pots  
white as Christmas and five new paintings  
– a fat frog on a reed mat a birch stand pencilled with flame  
slush and rocks waves and rocks lawns and rocks –  
then, two blonde women, local Greeks in rayon,  
worried by phantom gripe, spectral scratches same as me ...

He waves me in, grins backwards at the cheap Helens,  
an ape baring incisors, red gums.

We're comrades four shoulders, two cocks,  
men who flinch and wink at arias,  
the woman's cult of tea and torment,  
at shakes, nerves, jags, mists, humours and fancies.

Because no man has marked me a man, ever,  
I could just cry.

## SESSION

Behind a burgundy Blood Leaf, pruned for spring  
to spokes, red wands beneath an Inuit stone raccoon (do raccoons skitter  
so far north, turn white like tundra hares?) he finds  
*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*  
slaps the back cover on his thigh a pitcher summoning patience,  
suggests I catch.

I take the challenge home, smarting the pages smell of old coffee,  
the underneaths of beds,  
of highly ineffective patients not habituated to literature.

Page 71, four dried leaves (oak, pinched in green bloom)  
plus a Saint Cecilia bookmark smudged with cardamom, banded in blue felt

Page 133, evidence of a sneeze

Page 259, in pencil, under the fourth paragraph *God Alone*,  
then, three ochre sketches of lions sporting crayon crowns  
and smouldering spears

Page 282, all commas reamed to fibre with a blunt pin  
perhaps a barrette clasp or unwound spring a watch hand, an apple stem,  
whatever you use when knives and visits are not allowed

Page 304, a sticker, nickel sized (black kittens riding jack o' lanterns)  
and a warning, underlined with dabs of cooking oil, the spent end of a match,  
spit and eyelashes

*he will liy so you now but be OK? he liys like a bastard dog  
like all the carpets in the castle  
he's a smart watcher so watch back! be Ok*

## SESSION

Nervous sorts, my fellow patients: the man with hair like watered felt  
picking his hands the woman who stomps the boy in black lipstick  
with half a left ear three seniors,  
brother sister brother, ugly and alike, pill hounds,  
and David, my old friend David.

We have agreed to say nothing by saying nothing but he is always early  
and nearly teary.  
So what is there to say?

## SESSION

Because Doctor collects, today we chat about collections:  
rare guppy breeds, ugly wine labels from Germany (gnomes, stags,  
chastised children, endless chubby monks), gold stocks,  
Doris McCarthy landscapes (winters only), holiday socks all his.  
Then, my habit of hoarding calendula seeds, cat whiskers and found cassettes,  
Chinese deities I can't identify. He takes a note, whistles.

*I had a patient once, a man. Collected bridges. Bridge spotter.  
But he wouldn't cross one, not even a plank across a puddle,  
until I cured him, took him for a slow walk over the Bloor viaduct,  
held his hand like a baby.  
Now he's into chamber music. Berlioz and Bach, Gregorian chants,  
constant Classical 96. Even went to Venice.*

A Buddhist proverb I remember too late:  
If the Buddha leads you to a far peak  
kill him at the top.