

Angela Carr
Without Ceremony

poems



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Practice before Theory

But one night the door will open and we'll lean into the empty
room where footprints in the dust are impermanent
and prosaic. Idle ink stains on the walls,
a stack of Juicy Fruit on a bookshelf,
shiny balled wrappers, all signs in a mercurial
syntax that evaporates on exposure.

When we are seen as lesbian
they're uncertain which letters have fallen from the tree
and which are bruised, what makes the end of a given word feminine.
The words come to touch us deeply but we keep
them at a distance, sentimental and burning.

A lemon is squeezed
in a country they will never visit
and only fleetingly exists. As you know,
the book does not begin in the liquid state;
just like civility, taste is strongest
when two grounds are opposing
and streams roar, fervent.

Straight as an Arrow

If I begin to write and cross out words
that desire to take flight
and every phrasal verb
that equates civil service with poetry

at the base of the corkwood
an egg's fragmented shell
our last minor birth
retrained by the poem

Around/Harmonically Static

Red is the deepest part of the petal's
fast current, funnels to
flower stamen,
a word of caution
arranged on the other side.
In the Guggenheim,
sunlight's residual
secrecy coils,
a sleeping serpent.
A die-cast friendship
statuette displayed
at home, explicitly
for our reverence.
Nouns devoted to fasting
object strongly
to seed

*by proxy

uprooted.

Angels

I have yet to ask which of the two men in the food truck
is the eponymous Angel: the young man
who pours coffee and changes cash
or the one who cooks eggs rapidly and with flourish,
tossing foil-wrapped sandwiches over his shoulder to be bagged.
And I've never had a conversation with Angelina
who I see even before breakfast
at the gym. All I know about her
is that she's trying to get into shape.
An ampersand of proximity:
we share this name root, *angelus*, ridiculous
for its ethereal purity. Like me, wholly
ordinary, they also, likely,
lack halo and wings. Though one cannot be sure.
We are all immigrants,
which suggests we share
some proficiency in flight.

Then there's Angel Lopez,
who officiates at the Manhattan Marriage Bureau,
every day and first thing in the morning,
ceremoniously without ceremony.
In daily clothes
worn as wedding dress,
newlyweds can travel by subway
directly from there to work.

My high school chemistry teacher was the only
person ever to address me by the diminutive *Angie*.
I won the “Chemistry Award for a Girl”
upon graduation
and did not return for the ceremony.

In any cavity wall
there’s a dangerous void, the kind
you shouldn’t kid about. Take care
to avoid mistakes;
underground grids
should conduct relatively clean
water throughout the city.

Catalogue of Disasters

I was named after the divine messenger, *Angelus domini*.

They motioned to flick the air above my head and heard a hollow pinging sound as their fingers struck my invisible halo.

I was raised in the heart of dissatisfaction.

Over the windows hung floor-to-ceiling-length gauzy curtains

in some lights cream-coloured, in others appearing swampy greenish-yellow, in part because they reflected a moss-coloured carpet, in part

because they were darkened with smoke stains. Smoking and wall-to-wall carpeting were co-extensive with the suburb where I was raised in the eighties and my childhood.

My first bathing suit was a leopard-print bikini. I read Lucy Maud Montgomery novels by the pool, at times burning my skin irreparably, squinting at glaring white pages.

I had freckles nearly everywhere and never learned how to twirl a baton. Early on, I stopped wearing patterned fabrics.

There was a tapestry featuring an owl, as always, above the stairs,
perched in imaginary, shadowy rafters.

We all know descent is most challenging.

They secured clothes on the line with large, pastel-coloured plastic pegs. Folded
cotton fabrics stiffened in the sun. A photographic image, kept in place.

Once, a nude was visible through their compass window
even with the curtains closed.

The suburbs commanded introverts to burn the fossil fuel of their creativity
to make them unable to separate from their context.

Their low, angular slopes sheltered everyone. As though cornered, they were coerced to stay.
The suburbs were the anguish of muted green under the wings of animus.

They refracted rural serenity through a dialogical opposition of toxic fungus
and fungicide, wild pest and pesticide, abjuring privacy.

The Music Did Demand Certain Things

Stubbornly on repeat, a cassette
was stuck in my Ford Granada's ancient tape player
all summer like a settled
idea. In the end
on a late August day
I pulled and the magnetic tape unwound
like fishing line
coming out wet and
blind to its original structure.

A nest of greyish
wrinkled ribbons, later
abandoned by fledglings:
dear suburban memory,
locate the front door
of teenage captivity,
passages swollen/pollen
swallowed in mediocre
pleasures.

On the desk beside *The Politics of Friendship*,
to love magic of proximity
and the past participle
of *to lose*.

It's not a lost cause, to recall
and earmark a memory
for a particular purpose.
Of course, it is dependent on us
but we do not want to impose
our will in spite of it or take
responsibility for its glow
caused by sunlight reflected
or its material demise. The memory
was designed to excavate a compound
long dismissed as impossibly
bodily, a choreography of false starts.

Proving Up for Honey

Honey-coloured frame around a portrait of Lucretius's translator
subdued in honeyed weekend light filtered through dusty blinds.
She regrets her words in an argument about gender and false beginnings,
stylishly holding out against repair.

It's time to revise her argument on knowledge as possession
so she scrutinizes her notes, running out of time, always,
feverish (which sounds just like the Portuguese verb for *to boil*).

Recall, Lucretius, we were once more liquid than this, like honey.
A group of teenage girls barges into the room, bringing delighted
excited energy.

It's contagious.

I wear a butter-coloured
shirt with *Honey* inscribed across my chest
in metallic copper thread.