Once upon a time a teacher told me, Your words are loose.

I asked, Loose like wild animals escaped from the zoo? Loose like the elastic in a pair of Stanfield's underwear? Loose like a tooth ready for yanking? Loose like a toupee in autumn gusts?

My words are loose, resisting capture, caught up in rapture, no more mine than wind, breath, joy, love. Words entrance; words are an entrance, an invitation to play, a transport of bliss, a portal from places of stasis to spaces of ecstasy, carried away in body and spirit.

My words are poems, full of delight, seeking places to light, in the midst of the alphabet and beyond the alphabet, weaving a fabric for a coat of countless colours, still always eager for the rupture that bursts the fabrication of contexts that enchant, a dizzying dance of loose-limbed letters.

a poem is

breath

waiting between the lines to be called
calling me calling you calling

the alphabet I learned
to write in school was spartan
pressed between parallel lines
eschewing swirls curls whirls
but now I ask always all ways
what lies beyond the alphabet?

beyond the creatures an ark might hold:

aardvarks baboons camels
donkeys emus frogs
gnats horses ibexes
jaguars koalas llamas
moose newts octopi
porcupines quail rhinos
snakes turtles unicorns
  vultures whales
  xylophages yaks zebras

beyond ludic lyrical words that begin with E:

  etymology eschatology
  ethnology ethnography
  etiology epistemology

beyond chemical elements, musical echoes:

  aluminum beryllium chromium
dysprosium erbiium fermium
gallium helium iridium
krypton lanthanum magnesium
nobelium oxygen platinum
radium sodium titanium
uranium vanadium wolfram
xenon yttrium zirconium

beyond flowers, a wild earth bouquet:

  azaleas buttercups crocuses
daïses epicalyxes fuchsia
geraniums hollyhocks irises
  jute kohlrabi lupin
marigolds nuts orchids
pansies quandong roses
shamrock tulips umbels
violets waterlillies xerophytes
  yarrows zygophytes

beyond theologians that begin with B:

  Barth Berdyaev Bultmann
  Bonhoeffer Bloch Buber Brunner

beyond ribbons of colour from heaven to earth:

  almond blue chalk
dark egg flame
green honey indigo
  jade kiwi lime
maple night orange
purple russet sandy
turquoise ultramarine violet
white xanthine yellow zinc

beyond even, of course, all of these:
jelly beans and lima beans
wrinkles and periwinkles
tractors and chiropractors
orthotics and orthodontics
brontosauruses and thesauruses
butter cups and cups of butter
dandelions and sea lions
butterflies and French fries
pickles and tickles
sharks and larks
lips and slips
bumble bees and humble d’s

a poem is

honeycomb

the sun in a summer meadow after rain
huddled in the hollow of the heart

a poet jigs a poetic line
plays in the space of the page
like a holy fool
contravenes convention
will not parade from left to right margin
back and forth as if there is
nowhere else to explore

instead knows lived experience
knows little of linearity
the linear sentence
only a chimeric sense of order
all of us creatures born of words

like a topographer the poet reads
tangled lines like a map
knows how to set
a course and maintain it
around ponds hills woodstands
even where the tangled lines
are scribbled knotty places
the ecotone where differences meet
in contest and rebirth

the poet weaves ways through
tangled lines, knowing
the wholeness in tangled lines
always holes and gaps
even seeing other lines
through the holes in lines
all crisscross weave
all language whole holy
tangled lines
beyond the alphabet

a poem is

the sun awash in a sea in summer’s twilight
a cactus that seeks water in a desert
a sea that flows in you through me

the **hyphen** is a tool
for word-making, word-play
a creator’s wand for naming
new words out of old words

absent-minded bear’s-ear
chicken-livered devil-may-care
ewe-necked fancy-free

an ecology of wording
like a patchwork quilt
gerry-rigged hybrid
diversity-in-unity

go-devil heart-free
ill-advised jack-in-the-box
know-it-all loose-jointed

two-in-one-three-in-one
a chain of words
linked lines
a train of words

make-believe narrow-minded
one-track pick-me-up
quick-witted red-hot

parallel lines pushing
without beginning end
against the walls
a rapture of rupture

self-pollinated tear-jerker
up-and-coming vice-consul
wait-a-bit X-ray

a liminal space where
we dance god-like
in our naming more words
always insatiably for more

yo-heave-ho Zend-Avesta

a poem is

a whisper in a crowded shopping mall
the light in blackberry brambles
a violet crocus in spring snow

Glossolalia

I speak in tongues
in other words
other languages
I do not know

like the believer
who speaks in tongues
from the spirit
not the mind
my words are not mine

but unlike the believer
with anointed words
I am polyglot
with glossitis
my words flat without gloss

I am a babbling poet
a wanderer in the alphabet
seeking my glossographer

but I want no glossarist
who will define me

I call a glossator
who will charge into the dark places
where lines run skew

will you be my glosser?

don’t read my words only

read the margins where
the words begin and end

read the spaces in the words
where the unwritten is written
read beyond my words
to scribbled words
of others almost hidden
in my words

and speak in tongues
in other words
other languages
you do not know

a poem is
scribbled letters out of breath
a tree on fire in autumn’s light
winter in the moon’s night

**am I a silent letter?**

in a word
clinging to other letters
but unspoken
a vestigial organ
like an appendix
or tonsils
serving no purpose
except to confound
spell(er)s
a disreputable cousin
lurking in shadows
not invited to the party
an eccentric uncle
nobody acknowledges
nobody can forget
known only
in the writing
unknown
in the speaking
seen and not heard
a hymn psalm sonnet
of silence

is a letter ever silent?

a poem is

a baby’s smile
a whispered response to prayer
a winter stone in April sun
as luck would have it

I am a **cliché**
trite threadbare twice-told
tired but happy, tried but true
a banal bromidic bathetic
specimen of humanity
well-worn warmed-over worn-out
doomed to disappointment
shopworn stale stock

along these lines
I am a cliché
prosaic platitudinous
working like a Trojan
jejune vapid shallow
no bolt from the blue
common flat dull
at the parting of the ways
over-used used-up

all too soon
I am a cliché
hackneyed stereotypical
with method in my madness
rubber stamped ready-made
safe and sound, sadder but wiser
derivative corny old hat
I set the wheels going
lifeless drained exhausted

still I was not always a cliché
once upon a time I was a word
repeated repeat repeated
repeat repeated repeat
once worth repetition
repetition rendered me worthless
the sprite turned trite
last as well as least
unable to keep up with the wor(l)d

as I grow older
always scribbled
I am more and more a cliché
my story more and more familiar
even before I have lived it
while less and less I write
my story written by others
too funny for words at least
a cliché in time saves nine
a poem is

the scent of rosemary lemon balm oregano

a word that gives you goose-bumps
twelve grain bread brushed with olive oil

not much flows in these coulees
except the cool dry wind
persistently claims ownership
refuses an easy hospitality

shrubs cacti grass
cling to the coulees
like a brush cut
that can’t hide the scalp

the sky is a concave ocean
pulled toward the centre
of the universe always moving

prairie grass, sage and wild rye:
no sage would try to name
all the things that grow in these coulees

a coyote writes lines in the wind,
reminds me I cannot
both see and write, and still
I write in order to see

like a gopher, a poet digs
an intricate map
of subterranean lines
with holes for popping up

I see the shadows of birds
but I cannot see the birds

the sun soothes with the wind
woos me into sleep
leaves me woozy even

I dwell in the coulee that does not flow,
this dry, arid coulee where cacti flame

I wait for the coyote
I write nothing

perhaps writing will come
in February when I am far away
flowing with the lines of sun
and trails and gopher hollows
and the roots of cacti
succulents can find water
where there is none,
suck the dry earth
like an orange sucks my dry mouth

a poem is
a heart’s beat, beating by heart
rooted in the earth
the frost on a winter window

I was enchanted,
once, heard a chant,
over and over,
a wailing Gregorian chant
like Demerara molasses,
Good Luck margarine,
my mother’s homemade
bread in long winter
afternoons, soft
sweet steam
in filled mouths

one more language
I don’t know
like Latin or Sanskrit,
a language of confession,
for calling clouds
into the lungs,
the breath of dark moist
rum-soaked fruit cake,
a poet’s language
I am trying always
to hear, to learn:
no light without shadows
no shadows without light

spilled silence
in my heart’s arteries
like clouds of lead
anchored me
to earth, spelled
heart’s desire,
arrhythmia really
writing only
erratic, aortic death

now I am learning
to listen with the eyes
of the heart, no
longer mesmerized
or smothered
by another’s chants,
learning instead
the rhythms of fire
in you and me

*a poem is*

dark wine crushed at the back of your throat
a heart grown still
these words lightly offered

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