

{ IN THE PINES }

ALICE NOTLEY

PENGUIN POETS



(IN THE PINES)

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ALSO BY ALICE NOTLEY

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Phoebe Light ♦ 1973
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For Frank O'Hara's Birthday ♦ 1976
Alice Ordered Me to Be Made ♦ 1976
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For my sons and their friends

IN THE PINES

IN THE PINES

1

Why should I respect, or convince, or even interest you? (Respect, conviction and interest belong *him*.) On earth. Where we except for those in charge are drained from giving ourselves to each other until there's nothing left. In the year of our President. Eighteen coaches long.

There is no earth. There was no creation, there is no evolution nothing ever said by a then or a now *one*—their 19th century minds. Backwater rising come on.

The only thing you need to know here is whether or not you can stand my voice. Of which there surely no such thing.

It is tones of bursting out but I can't *have* it, because it's composed of my inheritance and situation. That is a 19th century suit thought a black waistcoat and beard.

I may be trying to destroy you in order to live. I may only be trying to love you.

Jack of diamonds is a hard card, why should there be a story?

It's too hard a card to please, and it isn't the no earth I know. I got hepatitis C from shooting speed thirty-three years ago. But that isn't a story. Why are you continuing to read?

If you detest everything about your society, you say, why are you writing?

It is time to change writing completely.

You are not doing that.

Wait and see.

You have no stamina, you're a sick weakling.

*No one's calling me
to salvation or under
standing. who I am*

*on the old burnt ground, my baby.
the old burnt ground is my baby*

facing a taller woman. I've never come this far before

*The closet's in flames but he
lies dead in front of it. Staring*

*I am losing my because.
I said I was
the new species: no one.*

Momma don't treat your daughter mean.

There are tricks to writing novels, of no interest because the story loves whatever people do.

I hate whatever people do.

I am a real rat, unclear to myself, because there's no earth and no story. Unless I *am* a lab rat experimented upon by people like men, so that I can do their will. Within the rat I am light which bleak but the cast is disappearing so I can cease to become.

There are also tricks to writing poems, of no interest because poets tinker. On the cutting edge. Which isn't important unless it's the cooling board.

*Kill it
for the human
area is over.*

*I feature him. who?
any love you'd.
deny it, all that love.
but I can't.*

There's that thing of interest thing. "Interest" belongs, as I said, to him too: something is of *interest* the *he* structure says so.

I was not the taller woman. I have no more woman in me. I once heard a man say he had a woman within, but how could he if I didn't? They said, all writing is a translation.

It was on fire, the whole closet. The 19th century self, the culminative self, can it really burn? never burns.

Only, the ones I love die.

He lay there dead with his eyes wide open.

I'm supposed to say I saw that I screwed up. But all I see are flames.

Is that him dead or is that me?

Why should you want or get form or content?

Some sort of social contract that no woman ever made?

*It burned
but it was I*

*I was the closet
I was the witness*

*I was his
dead eyes.*

He left me his dead eyes—lucky.

Introducing chance but if I'm aflame there can be no chance just flame.

There was a point where I thought a chance event would change it, what, my way of occurring. Chance can only affect women within a circumscribed space. Within the smaller of the two rooms. C
earth.

Because your writing isn't a translation. It is all you are now.

All I am is this. So all of writing is changed. Now you have to compete with this reckless change. You are furious. *She is just right here. But I can't do that.*

I'm your dead eyes.

They came for him in a fiery chariot but they will not come for me for they are men.

How have they left you here?

I didn't apply for a position.

*Once you are left back because you didn't, there you
are she said. I*

don't have any she left.

The federales enter forever. Lefty announces

there is a federale

available

*to store your data. You have that. Data. (Or so
all the federales say.)*

2

You've never come this far before.

You feel it too? Yes.

I've run out of luck maybe. I shouldn't have to be alive now, in the year of our President, there was
no other time. No woman should be in time. I am not a woman. I am a luckless thing.

Chance will at least permit me to speak. This once. And this once, easy.

Then who has luck? No one, the new species. How? I can now deny my name.

It's this light within rat.

I was packing up again, so when I awoke I was afraid. I had had to hide my diaphragm. (But you're
too old for that.)

Why did I ever have to do anything?

Momma told me I was happy; she would cry if I wasn't. This is the way this sadness works. C

course it doesn't show up in your man speculations, though you will tell me which of my neurons a
lit when I'm listening to the blues. I won't let you get your hands on them, you little shit.

She and I, no one, staring at the wall where the tree shadows change to the blood red writing we, n
one, can see. Can you tell me which of my neurons light up when I see it?

We stare at it from that bed. Luck would have it. This is not that kind of inheritance. It was a lot o
bad luck, which is not the same as chance. Or a lot. None of this is statistical, crying out to yo
through his dead eyes, as he thinks how he messed up.

It's almost a story or a poem but it's really a song because it's ripping me apart.

How can you be the new species from this old mess?

The new species, the changed writing from the core of the rat light. It's the only thing left.

It's my connection with my loving momma and daddy. No one.

No one is now the only possibility.

Do you remember how you got it? Not very well. It isn't a story unless I make it that, and the
would be a lie.

Maybe *you* remember how I got it, since everything's a story to you. Maybe you should tell m
story if you already know it. Why do you bother reading anything anyway?

I'm talking directly to you.

The only thing to say about it is that coming down was awful in a way that was disconnected from
anything in the real. So the real isn't real, but feeling awful is. I couldn't believe I could feel so ba
without feeling *about* anything.

This is what you learned from those drugs, you say.

If one thinks that way I say.

Feeling awful is physiological you say.

God I hate you, I say. Yes you can find the neurons for feeling awful. Do you think you can find th
neurons for the fact I hate you?

It will depend on how actively emotional the hatred is.

I can do it so coldly you can't find it I assure you.

Yes, I know you want physical exposition. You want the physical tale that you know. I'm trying t
tell you, I don't have it any more. I am a dead man's eyes. I haven't seen anything for an infinity.

Never drive a stranger from your door

Momma

Isn't that all I've ever done?

But if a stranger is more rat light I am not doing that now.

Where is chance in this light?

If it was chance I did drugs then but was it. It just was.

*Jack of die
you can hear the diamonds.
If I keep hearing them
I can be dead, just listening.*

Because what I love is this song.

Would you die for it? I may. But chance is involved here. I have a slightly better than fifty percent chance of getting better. For a while at least. They've done the statistics.

I am no one, the new species, just like you.

I can barely face how much she'd lost. Suffered. Depending on which woman. Or he, too, the dead man. Which one. But you will have your own experience and I needn't tell you a story. You have your own loss. Do you *have* it? What should you do with it? Can the neurons be found to light up in the constellations of your suffering?

*All of our experience
that fiery
so no one ever even says it
any more. It's
exactly what no one says.
(song by No one)*

She lay there she lay and lay there. Women weeping around her and quiet men. Her hair is on fire now that is thought, are her neurons burning up? She isn't thinking any more, you say. I say, she's now free to think. All of her real *life* is on fire the particulates escaping from us and our hold.

But she loved to live. Or do you mean she wanted to survive? That's what you'd say—the intention of the organism.

Jack of diamonds is a hard card to hold.

I can't hold on.

Hold on.

The doctor said she'd fought hard to stay alive. He was judging from what he'd seen as she lay unconscious after the accident; he assessed the spirit of a woman he'd never seen awake. I began to cry loudly. I did this to help the others know that she was dead and now we must mourn her. I remember thinking, I have to help them get to that next place. I could hardly bear to watch them move from the edge of suffering, to suffering, though I was about to grieve too.

I couldn't bear to experience *their* grief. Was my intention to survive?

You've had this experience. What do you think?

What do I do with the loss I *have*? you ask. Now that I have survived, I *have* this. In the new species it becomes all of fire.

The intention of the organism is to know.

I say I don't have enough stamina to clean all the rooms.

I say I may not have enough stamina for all this. The others will insist I have. No one can sing the blues like no one. Believing in paradise which is red like fire.

3

*I never wanted to do you wrong.
You are the one I wanted least to
do that to. This must be a universe of
care, that hoot-owl moaning; please*

*don't mischaracterize me, I would not
want to wrong you. I never wanted
to sing this song. But now it's mine.*

That was me, I was sick. No, he lay there. His eyes were two circles of small flames.

Since the heat in my eyes is unscientific and unsound I cannot tell you of my death, though the purpose of literature is to court her daily and go away. It is to create an only world of chance where anything might be said by the dead who, only, speak.

Who else is speaking? he asked.

My sister approaches the bank of snow to die in the state mental hospital, no one. There is no official cause of death, is there? The bank of snow, the bank of snow is rising. I will melt it with the heat from my dead eyes.

*My politics aren't yours I say
But I am yours he says. You are.
I would not go to war, I say,
for you, with you, anywhere.
But I am yours he says. You are.*

There is no official cause of death, is there?

That's because we're really no one.

By chance they didn't know the cause of her death, because she was poor. So her madness was the cause of her death. She entered the building where she died. Causality. Nothing of her turned out well. Nothing of her turned out well. Except for the fire that left her, to merge with the fire we all are.

The light in your body is not greater than mine.

I ain't lookin' for nothin' in anyone's eyes. *So you say.*

What was good about it? Something must have been good.

But you were a man.

I got no more than you.

True.

More or less loss?

I've lost my measure for that.

I didn't care much what happened to me, so chance didn't matter. Yet some instances of chance have so scored me, I don't know if they're beautiful or plain.

If no one and I speak in the fire we can turn our backs on leaders, and all but that which concerns us our loss.

Is it beautiful?

I always imply yes.

Where is the implication?

On the edge where I can't see, on the periphery.

She falls asleep

I let go of the balloon

with her name on it.

You have nothing to hold on to.

Then how can you keep reading; but you can't stop.

These crimson flowers have gold encrustations in their centers and at their edges black rubies recognize as menstrual blood burning. It was a sanitary pad burning in a fire, this never happened. What did?

If I were the woman who died in the asylum, and nothing of me turned out well, when she let go the balloon of my name I didn't really die either. Like my brother's eyes later mine were fire.

My eyes were on fire of no one. They had erased me, mostly, with the lobotomy.

I'm not telling her story, she doesn't have one.

I am her.

How?

Somewhere in the genetic code you invented so precisely. For she and I are relations.

I rode the top of the train stretched out, that is my body in the tunnel. Before he died he could not think of his sister.

Brother and sister, your connections are precise because. Do you know why? There's a woman by the river is enough of the story.

She stood by the river for twenty-one years then crossed it. She had to cross it by herself.

That isn't by chance, that's what we do. It was always my intention to know that this was what I was doing. That has been my only intention.

You are all my sisters and brothers, though you might prefer I didn't say that. It is the most disruptive thing that one can say.

Having not been welcomed to safety even though she was poor and unwell, my name is no one. I never had a lover.

Why should there have been anything to do in life?

I am tortured by my heart which they say is my mind. I don't care about those two words.

I was sitting on the grass watching.

This is a check for you.

I can't buy much in the hospital, but you're my brother and gave it to me, so I like it.

I have no mind.

It hurt me too much.

They said I tried to hurt someone.

You had a genetic defect.

You are my brother aren't you defective too?

I'm not the one

I can't be the one

who.

To give her up

to the coat

Gave her up

to her defect

no word in her throat

Your genes are defective my love

Whose mind are you? All of those I say. No one and my defect tells you nothing. When your baby's on the cooling board. Yes I've seen that too.

You aren't telling me anything.

The wind blew that way because it liked to.

No one will tell me where they've gone.

My Latin teacher says, those happy people are shits. They are using an affect to tease you. We know a different language, for when the mind breaks. Or the oldest explanation of the failure to love her.

'I knew you were in charge of me but my mind broke on its own.'

My mind is rubbed raw. The people who are in charge of me are happy.

You find the needle repellent. He found it dramatically ambivalent. For me it had no qualities.

For me, I myself have hardly any characteristics.

I sometimes have them in my dreams. The story is false. Why is the story generated? For beauty sake? For the sake of making a thing besides fire and light?

I need to gauge how much these people suffered. The body of the famine takes a deformed and ambient dream shape; and she slept in her beauty, crushed by quake and bomb.

What is a needle in the St. James Hotel next to the fact that someone never grew through all his born days? Never spoke. For thirty years like an infant. We shared genetic material.

I played for her on the piano a certain tune over and over.

This world is too full of hate. I didn't hate anyone when I used the needle, not even you. I began to hate you later, when I knew you'd always be there, holding power.

There are different hospitals to suffer in in different ways. There are healers there too.

The holder of human power has not valued the beings in these rooms as much as his bombs, his pretence of piety, and ability to seize resources. Impose his product. A murder mystery. But this is the murder. Is he of value?

*I played the song for
you, because you
wanted me to, though
you could never say so.
Who is of value? You.*

*Who crossed the river
controlled and confined
a slave to the prevalent
definition of defect.*

I don't want there to be a president.

I don't care if I die undefended. Though I want to get well.

I hate every part of you allied with power.

But I'm speaking to you because you've been in those rooms where we can no longer touch our lovers, because their skin hurts, or touch them with words they can answer. Why do you want to do anything but understand *them*?

*Under my dress
under my dress
is a layer of shit*

*Under that layer of shit
am I*

am I.

Aren't I defective? The wind is disturbing my heart. I am the new species, born of the needle. C
Whatever I might say. Everyone in the new species is defective.

Everyone's composed of their losses, they are purely negative, where the firing squad has nothing
aim at.

A human killed by a human. Is it beautiful? Falls asleep. Disemboweled or hatcheted. Gone. Are yo
gone? He laid him down. I wish I didn't know you.

*I hope the steeple topples
I hope all your religions die
Not you, not you.*

*The vending machine has lit up
to tell us it's empty.
What did you think you ever had to sell me?
You are trying to sell me
a human killed by a human.*

*It's been so long since I've accepted
anything you've had to tell me
that the universe has disappeared
I guess it wasn't there.*

Basically I think you're no good, but I'll talk to you. I can't think of anything else to do.

I've forgotten what I care about. The universe has disappeared into a machete wound. Newspaper
receives prizes. 'I work for my living.' I don't. Who wants me to live?

There were those for whom few people had that wish, that they live.

I'm no one there's no universe, he says dead.

Maybe it's all just a mood. Neurons light up in the shape. The president's neurons and yours ar
mine connecting to the gaping heart wound the machete blade has forced, sing out to the strange
gone. Are you gone?

On the corner of Electric and Resource.

Different language for when the mind breaks. The language doesn't break at all, the mind does, I d
do you?

*Anything I can't say
Because I wasn't supposed to
Has disappeared anyway.*

What's left. The fire. What's left?

I was still letting him drive in a dream.

You don't know. I want you to know. Why?

Poor girl, dressed in black, po-lice at your back. But of course he sang Poor boy. Because he was driving.

I am neither girl nor boy. Nor both. When I look at you you're empty too.

If living is a defect, still it was too dark to see it. Because we had to have eyes, unless we were singers, blinded by machetes from the African future, to which we were connected. At that time I sang, Jack of die.

There is a diamond in my wound and I can't see it. In my defect. In my defect.

5

The intention of the organism is to know its life. Is that right? says the dead man.

*Your eyes are like times
your eyes are like people
your eyes are like failures to see*

*my eyes are like rhymes
my mother's back yard
covered with pine needles
stabbing your eyes*

*on the ground it's misty night.
The fence is silver-sharp spikes*

*on the edge where I can't see
on the periphery.*

By chance I was born to appear to you to be a woman, my mother's daughter, she hears me small girl calling to her in trouble on the phone in her dream, dressed up like a choir. I forgot to tell her I was everyone. If she loves me it isn't because of the intention of the organism. It is because of the love, you are in it you know. Then at that time that's what you know. Then in that time you don't have to know. That's why I'm not telling a story.

You don't have to solve the murder. You did it. You sold everyone a human killed by a human.

Bent over backwards, because the X-rayed beloved has dust on it. It's such a dusty rat.

I lie here his eyes dry flames and the sisters of luck.

It was my luck to be tormented by the people advancing themselves over others. It was your luck

Whose luck was it? This is going nowhere. Because I'm dead or because it's the human situation you
say

I can't see.

There's no such thing as a situation.

What about your illness? you say. Oh, the plot.

And now he is leaving and going away. Part of the murder of my love.

It's somewhere in a torndown house that's now the post-office.

She shook it and broke it.

It's below the house that isn't there.

No one but he's someone to me, and if only these relations remain, after all I've done and know
why did I? No one and I'm no one to myself. Not his daughter, but I'm his daughter, because I'm his
and this love the fire that never dissolves in these eyes you've named, because you weren't a woman
Well neither am I. And there's nothing for you, too.

If everybody's my parents and children, my sisters and brothers. If everyone's my love. Still I saw
you dead, watching over you. You were your own angel.

*And his double instructed him
To leave me coded messages
From his death
In every poem he wrote.*

*This is the circumstance of trees
Gone forever from the yard.
It's too dark for my sister to go out.
Don't let her go out there yet.*

If you only care for others you'll get nothing in this world. Nothing for you, too.

I cared for others all my life, he said. And still I was wrong.

I'm trying to give you everything I have. But I can't find it; I can't find it yet.

*And I traded my face for one
pierced with ruby studs.
Because I loved you*

I mean, because you loved me.

*This is where the writing was never generous.
Where it broke into partiality
I became partial to myself. And you, to you.*

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