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April 11, 2011

A Manner of Waiting

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Abstract

A Manner of Waiting

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A Manner of Waiting is a sonnet series comprised of forty poems relating to a wide variety of topics with a focus on food as well as the poetic tradition of female poets.

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1

Gertrude Stein

In the outside there is reddening, in  
the outside there is pushing. Inside them  
is something else entirely, something  
hulking and immense come to ruin us.

A white egg and a colored pan and a  
monster: this is all that is left. This is  
all we need to see to know there  
is no plan or alternative for them.

An imitation, more imitation,  
a little bullshit— when we checked there was  
nothing to find that we could hold. There was  
nothing to find that would help at all. They

need a pet oyster, they need it to hold,  
to rub for luck— something of the world to keep.

2

The ark of the ache of it

The egg is the unrecognized star of  
cooking. She burns, sideways, craving wild  
hares and rabbits hung whole, haunches of elk.  
Piles of the stuff. Crates and boxes. To

eat in front of a boyfriend or lover  
was an impropriety, but she thought  
the fire-eater was a nice man so  
it might be okay, just this once. Her heart,

like a giant multipetaled  
flower, opened to him. He said to her,  
“Don’t salt it too generously, my sweet.”  
She reigns herself in, looks down at the plate.

The onions are dark amber, their scent sweet  
and pungent. She breathes, turns inward. Waiting.

3

But you burn, and I know it

Things were different then, in the house where  
there were his sons and their wives and children.  
For ages, it was a secret that when  
they ate the deviled eggs at the picnic,

they were really eating his twists and turns.  
My crops grew up without my help, lucky,  
and nights— my vagrant body in her bed.  
The year was restless all through. Women who

ate meat he found odd, and she spilled it all.  
Running through the house, telling what they'd been  
fed, all the tchotchkes banging and clanging  
with the lies. Normal people do not set

themselves on fire, but he had no choice.  
He'd been a damned fool to accept the call.

4

Mina Loy

There was a time when I understood the  
rotation of your spirit and sequence  
of your innermost breathing, but you make  
more noise than any man in the world when

you clear your throat before we kiss and me,  
I don't like phlegm. I don't even like a  
sticky mouth, the mucus membrane  
viscous and warm, your breath.

And anyhow who am I that I should  
criticize your theories, moves, physical  
nearness and textures, your aggravated  
tuggings and your elbow in my side at

supper. But that was all— I caught the thread  
of the argument, slid down your gullet.

5

A voice like north wind

The season's best and most colorful  
are chosen first. Today,  
despite its remoteness and the slow pace  
of fading, I am dying here in parts.

"Joe DiMaggio was born here," he says,  
and I do not hear, of course. I did  
not often listen, my wavering head  
atop his shoulders or my own,

but in later years his toothiness helped.  
Me, like you, our selfishness and absolute  
confusion a blight upon us. We move  
sideways, we do an out of body thing.

"They must be millionaires," I say to me  
years later, when we saw him dine with Joe.

6

If you suppose this in August

Uncover the food. After an hour,  
uncover the rest— your next move, perhaps  
classic, summery, checkered, underground,  
a pattern as yet unknown, will change us.

A heritage like that is no joke. Your  
first mistakes was a kiss, your second was  
treating it like a plastic replica of  
a kiss. What did you think, imitations

would have that creamy, luxurious texture?  
Your desires, uninspired and serial,  
had failed, but at least the bees had done well:  
for your wounds, some honey, warm and thick.

“The flavor stays with you,” we whisper, soft,  
down low. You won’t ever remember it.

7

H.D.

We forgot – we worshipped her once, before  
the flies and the sleepwalking, before they  
put her into one room to stay for good.  
Even then, shrine-like, some came to listen  
at the cracks where the molding crumbled,  
either perceiving the other-side of  
everything (knowing she must have remained  
the same) or with malice, laughing at her  
descent into insanity.

As for

the lady in question, chatter came from  
her chamber in the afternoons, but at  
night she fell silent, though before she  
screamed. Her captors sighed in the silence of  
evening, declaring their work so lovely.

8

As one somnambulist to another

But for life the universe were nothing;  
then there was none to fill it. Unless  
I could perhaps whittle strips off to  
populate the spaces, the empty land,

“make it nice.” Said with a slight tilt of the  
skull, that could mean anything, even that  
now, from under the cloud, bone, hardship thick  
in your lungs, life could be rewritten. And

thankfully, the French know what to do with  
the tough meat, slippery coast and steady.  
In time, I could learn, and perhaps one day  
the aromatic waft of emptiness in spring

would not remind me of it. The dark parts—  
all of which were on the menu— would yield.



9

When they arrive, they are scrambled eggs

This waste was not fed to swine or hens, and she understood why. There was nothing else but cheap wine, eating cheese, and talking to the crazy mob. There were

also the kitchens of busy people in festive moods and for her, that too was intolerable. I didn't care. I was a late convert to olive oil,

but my first *pain à l'huile* was mind-blowing and I ate only that for days. In time, they thought I'd have grown out of it, but I haven't. I haven't learned to leave my heart at

home; most days I fill it with fire.  
The self is experienced as alien.

10

Marianne Moore

“There must have been more time in Shakespeare’s day  
to sit and watch a play,” but here I am  
caught in between Frank O’Hara and a  
meat grinder, on the verge of leaning, so

theater will have to wait. I’ve got “hands  
that can grasp, eyes that can dilate, hair that  
can rise if it must— these things are” good for  
something more than the watching, waiting, the

slow fire to cure me dry. Forgive  
me for being so oblique, my arms are  
heavy with fruit, and it exhausts me. I  
describe these things not for my pleasure but

because telling is useful. If ever you  
were me you’d know “this is eternity,”  
Realize you were never.

11

Shall I remember later?

A combination of five different  
plots all told at once is often too much.  
In a well-stocked home, bar, or casino  
the words can tangle and get caught in your

mask, the alcoholic kick. The cocktail  
burns and dilutes each story word by word.  
For an orangey version of this thing  
you can add Florida, a vacation,

the sweet coconut rum that goes well with  
stories told too many times and not heard.  
Alternatively, you can light this on  
fire, burn it to the ground with listening.

This great summer is a whiskey version  
of the last, and the last, and last, amen.

12

Lovely weather hurts my forehead

*I often write between the hours of  
ten pm and dawn, you said, and I knew  
that I had a permanent place on your  
kitchen counter, and you at my table.*

*I don't have much time for cop shows these days,  
I said and shrugged. Life had caught up with me.  
Drizzle the honey into the glass, say  
something solemn, somber, syntactically sound.*

You were born with the most important thing  
of all. You're brave beyond belief.  
Bottom line: I might be sleep deprived, but  
I never turn off my phone for you, a

habit I wish I never needed to  
develop. Layered below, I wait for—

13

I totter to the lip of the cliff

We never knew there were so many ways  
to fry a banana, so to speak. It  
could be fixed by something other than tv  
marathons and sleeping pills, though none of us  
knew that until it was past our bedtimes,  
or whatever you want to call it  
when you're 32 and have a curfew.  
The cure for losing it at age eight when  
your dad taught you how to write a business  
plan and you couldn't handle it, the cure  
for eating only organic foods and  
only then when you can throw them up a  
minute later. The salve for hurt feelings  
and too much loving too soon and being fat  
and being tired. Living a life alone.

14

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Sometimes, love, I have a hard time seeing  
who you are. That's not quite what I mean, I  
mean sometimes I confuse other people  
with you, for instance there's a boy on  
my street with your walk. He wears his hood up  
and his shoulders up and it's not until  
he stops to talk with the burrito seller  
and you laugh; and you are you, none  
other, that I know. In rooms less bright with  
roses you would not have. I'd have passed  
on, silent, without memory of my  
pinkening face in your smile. Oh,  
this have I known always: Love is no more  
than the breath, the permanent, the ever.

15

The pirate who is restless and pacing

Today, she learned that French cheeses are made  
only with unpasteurized cow's milk, and  
like she sometimes did, got excited about  
the fact. Last week she read that spoilage was

a far greater danger to the common  
cut of meat than fevers were to children.  
How to cook a pheasant with the necessary  
attention took her longer to master.

The loss of the meat made us ravenous,  
but study on she did. No matter if  
later we found there were manias  
similar to her voracious need

to learn to understand Cezanne much better.  
We held her in, with us, a captive head.

16

So many invisible angels

15,000 new products every year,  
advertised and sold beneath our house. New  
Products: Mini Cheeseburgers, razors, thought  
(rational), and love in initialed form.

At home, we select mostly recipes  
with bacon, birthday cake the exception.  
*Moussaka* is an eggplant-based *mezze*  
common in Greece, and we are suspicious.

Here is a smooth, rich cocktail that's sweet, low  
fat, and nothing we would ever drink—  
so if you're coming over, don't skimp on  
buying Miller Lite and some boxed wine.

Chilled lobster with arugula, we'll eat,  
but we don't stand on ceremony here.



17

You even taste like the sun

He taught me everything the old-fashioned way. We slept slowly, barely relating dreams— I, that Heinz used many fresh and ripe cantaloupes and he the Pittsburgh skyline.

Keep the neck and any other innards here, between us. He doesn't know that sign or my skyline, but the head leaning in the direction of my hips— he knows me.

Once early on he was pleased to see that I appreciated the cooking of the deep south and was surprised I'd never had real barbecue. Here's how they do it.

You cook it down, slowly. You taste and sniff. It looked quite wild in a careful way.

18

Laura Riding Jackson

Yes, I took another day- I moved to  
another city, one of the few things  
I can truly say I did for me. Yet  
upon arriving, nothing was what I

believed home meant, and home had closed behind  
me. Yes, we pause between sense and luminousness  
and live. Yes, our brains were not made for  
the transition between love and leaving, but

when, when the day? Is this to be alone?  
Once, a girl cried on a plane both coming  
and going, bought sweet tea at McDonald's  
when, that far north, there was no other place

to go. This is not exactly what I  
mean any more than the sun is the sun.

19

It is possible that things will not get better

Ground beef will stick together firmly if  
you squeeze hard enough, most things will. Like when  
your puppy squeezed through an electric fence  
when you were younger, the kind for cattle  
not for dogs. We, mortal things made up of molecules,  
are both fallible and foldable, the  
only cost a little trauma and blood  
depending on what's going where. We  
learn to alter the sweet and sour face  
of time and its utter prescriptions. At  
the last church service I ever went to,  
the singing was awful and I can't  
recall a thing. It's been too long, pushed  
and molded as I am, for memories.

20

There are stars we haven't heard

They are served with a silky red wine. They  
are given only what they can define  
in small words. Around the table tales of  
an urban beekeeper circulate centrifugally;

not even in a city of gourmet tastes  
was such decadence allowed.

*Deconstruct your bird. If you're nervous just  
run,* a voice whispered. The birds didn't fly

in that city's skies— they couldn't catch one.  
With an earthy tartness, the world moved on.  
Over time they fell into the manner of speaking  
of themselves as Aztec, removed and final.

*Mix up your afternoon routine,* they heard  
it say. They never managed it quite right.

21

This is a holy scripture or a movie

“Mondays are never useful for thinking, making decadent ice cream sandwiches, or kissing on the lips,” she said, a bitter twist to her lips. We both loved the place, weren’t ready to leave just yet. Hoping for a reason, we gorged ourselves on sarcasm and wine— if you try it for long, you’ll starve. We weren’t quite afraid, and certainly not saying it.

Support was growing for our style,  
the mocking way we let nothing matter.  
Foodstuffs are classified according to  
biological— no, to us.

We demand,  
*You! Here, take, eat. I recommend  
this dish to all who lust after me.*

22

Lorine Niedecker

So listen, here's the thing, I love you in spite of the coconut on your tie. No, sorry, I'm trying to be funny because I'm nervous. What I mean to say is I

love you magnificently. I've had each hand engraved with your scent, your flavor vast and recumbent in my heart and stomach for these years now. How can I tell you I fell

in love again, that I fall at least most days (I'm kidding, *every day*) in love with you and your irascible wit, your new vocabulary and constant motion.

It's the fact that you cover ugliness with apple trees, and that you're so damn cute when you eat Cheerios.

23

Worlds I made I miss

Whether you prefer traditional or contemporary,  
the chrysanthemums might satisfy.  
After party, relaxing, herbs— psychedelic highs  
obtained by licking lemon sorbet off the spoon,  
freezing the tongue and crackling the nerves.  
It will stop hurting in a while. Well, I guess it never hurts,  
but bodies in some continents are contractually committed  
to sting, slightly at least. His words are  
decomposing in the soil with no harm to the earth.  
They're steeped in absolutes, and I can't get in.  
Another manuscript of the same century has a crude  
and torrential way of handling the topic: his hands underneath,  
altering the sound with each subsequent release,  
twisting each individual fiber 'til it pings.

24

To an old spiral, a well of questions

Parsley must be the friendliest herb of  
any in the universe; it freshens.

Put a small spoonful of this mixture on  
your neck, push it down, green and bending slow,

in a large bowl, mash it with your  
fingers, twist it into spirit, bone, lung...  
In case you've never had them, baby beets  
and tendrils bring life, baby beats spread to

cumin seeds, fennel seeds, in a mound on  
your table, below your chair, lurking.  
To the juice add oil and enough hot  
breath to call it into being, burning.

Popular with adults and children and  
each of the lonely angelic host.



25

I'll fall asleep again down your shadow

On the first long trip, there was no room for  
the boxes side by side comfortably.  
We waited, tired, hung-over, each  
alone in our worry and struggling with  
translations. We were in the wrong country  
and it didn't bother you much. Your masses,  
attendant, bothered me. What could be done?  
At times when paella is served, you  
should be careful, happy. You usually  
are. I remember tobacco leaves strewn  
upon the paper, using a controlled  
amount of air to assure it would light.

Under that moon, anything was, was not,  
was. Here, there— we have never had breakfast.

26

Barbara Guest

I am in a stranger ocean than I  
wished. Where I come from, salt crystallizes  
with heat or light but here bubbles sink down  
low and as I surface, salt, melting on  
my lashes, becomes a silty dark  
liquid something like tears or balsamic  
vinegar. A substance acidic and  
somehow dangerous.

I float, my face  
eroding and limbs flung asunder. Now  
the suspension, you say, is exquisite,  
and I have become yours and also dead.  
The ladle of galactic rhythm primed  
as a relish dish at your command, my  
body struck by the tension of your weight.

27

Between the memorable

There was a sandwich we ate nearly each day: some sort of rich cheese, the Serrano ham of every *tapas* place, and a thick, crusty bread that crumbled down my shirt and made the boys tease me. We were always hung over and most of us drank beer, washing down each precious bite with a swig of *pelo del perro*, trying to teach the natives our way. But me, I savored each taste of it alone, dreading the next four hours, the inevitable jerk and drop of my head, unintelligible command, the angry sun and my restless sleep lurking there across the river.

28

## A hollow feeling on Labor Day

Let's do a group stretch— here, touch the femur  
to the man and we'll get started. Don't say  
you can't do it; lie instead. We'll all  
believe when you say you kissed a football  
player. Your skin to the nearest ink well,  
hold it for long enough to write a love  
poem but not enough for Dickens, who  
needs the patriarchy and a future when

it looks so nice on your skin? The reason  
you can't reach now is that you were too fucking  
busy holding hands when we were grasping  
at infinity. Apparently the terrain has  
changed, stretched long. Remember  
it's okay to be the tortoise not the hare.

29

She was his arms and legs and maybe

Tart can be made so quickly with so few mechanisms, and when dealing with us, sensational entrees make meals into feasts— ballets, orchestras playing behind.

Vegetables, besides being loaded with water, are linked to good marriages. A potato crust has 1 egg, 3 cups cut Yukon Golds, and twenty some years of heat,

batter, and topping without argument. To love is a hard thing, and without her to run the numbers to know our carrot consumption, our health, we would surely be

ruined. She is there; she reheats the meat mixture. Tops with biscuits— our favorite.

30

Lyn Hejinian

From that time on she ate her pudding in  
a pattern, carving a rim around the  
circumference of it, plucking at  
its skin and eating little. She'd learned at

a young age that a successful man was  
no lightweight, and a successful woman  
kept her tongue and bloodline to herself, in  
addition to keeping a slim figure

and balanced checkbook. This is one of those  
things that continues. Her daughter learned  
it and her daughter too. But language is  
restless— the rules changed when the men were out

to lunch. Cities were razed in that short  
hour— burned, torn, rent with secret notions.

31

I carry illusions of becoming

The beard of the mussel is its brain, its nervous system; the vein of the shrimp is its intestine and shit. Skate wing is the fin of a ray— used to swim, not fly— and pork butts are really pigs' shoulders (or would be if pigs had arms). Polenta is onlu Italian grits, but pierogies are not Polish gnocci. A scallop's foot is something like a foot.

The chive is a lily  
and the shallot is a lily and the  
green, red, yellow, Vidalia and Spanish  
onions are lilies. The better a chef,  
the more he drinks, and a female spoon, like  
a female cook, is the kind that has holes.

32

No one we know wants it that badly

In a dream you saw a way to survive.  
Children under, say, *ten*, shouldn't know that  
your own visions have always struck you as  
useless.

Almost all the words we've said to

one another are gone. You can almost  
forget what brought you here, this far in, sky  
from Thrace, from Denmark, I could be from Rome  
waiting, a tangle of silk in your hands.

Silhouettes of lovers and memories-  
you were not alone.

Surrounded, detached  
in measureless cold, uncertain of all,  
besides, you breathe differently down here.

In the middle of hell, these reptiles  
surround us. Breathing heat with shattered lungs.



33

Alice Notley

Sundays can be difficult. We differ  
as to what kind of grease it is— I say  
bacon. And it begins like it always  
has— I still have to bother about things  
besides décolletage and the world no  
longer reads *National Geographic*  
for its first glimpse of nipples. My problem,  
then, is esoteric. Where our orphan

earth, oh Anne of Green Gables, you who I  
loved so much? Where the fierce  
hurt ambition, the resistance and the  
goddamn truth? In the days Guinevere is  
Jenny, but I know I carry a lance  
and night by interminable night it  
grows closer to the surface. I ready  
myself silently for the time I will

clarify, compose the finitude of  
words moving as beautifully, stunningly,  
or horrifically as the human  
body by the time she is naked and  
splayed outright with the heaviness of it  
all. Myself a poster child for why  
even pretty girls have therapists and,  
I believe, are almost always alone.

I like the world because he's funny he  
doesn't care too much for anything and  
finally a man knows that I am yet  
alive, like my own like my own voice will be.

34

As they are shaking now across my heart

Then roll lengthwise like a jelly roll, seal  
ends, move on. Come on now, dance down to  
the blender, combine all ingredients,  
mix up your bookshelf and we'll listen here.

Heat the vinegar, heat the water to  
its pitch, warm yourself under the fire  
and shape each portion of hand and liquid  
into a 12-inch roll. This is you now—

simply place it on top of the rest and  
let the heat melt it. You are among them,  
you remain to be served in patty shells  
or with toast. You will not be divided;

they will stand cookies around your sides and  
cover you with Christmases, tinsel and rhymes.

35

Everything sounds funny in a funny magazine

When she gave me the book *Bacon: A Love Story*, I wanted a novel from it.

How strange and delightful— a romance of pork belly, delicate layers of crisp

meat bordered with luxurious warm fat,  
a girl enveloped, entranced with the thing  
and also heartbroken. I wanted to  
have written it myself, have it be my

own little miracle, my paean  
to what I love best, breakfast and savor,  
my crispy slice, veritable and like  
nothing else. Oh, there will be love, there will

also be blood and hurt, sizzle and twist,  
there, tuned low, just slightly about to burn.

36

Bernadette Mayer

Wake up! It's the middle of the night and  
you can't be here when I become someone  
else tomorrow, someone without her hair  
done but with lots of little problems that  
groan when I'm not by myself enough. All  
my time alone I spend considering  
my sale or theft of myself, the hang-ups  
I have with posing nude for pictures and  
learning about your personal hygiene.  
And I try to write but as we know the  
poem is not the thought so I can't think my  
way into it, and these days I don't write  
poems 'cause I spend all my time wanting to  
fuck you, though I want to rise beyond it.

37

A rough outline of a possible moment in a life

For all the L.A. out-of-town cool cats. This is for you!  
I'm cradling the alphabet between my thighs.  
Whether you prefer traditional or  
unhealthy advice, please take off your pinkest layer  
when eating. Be proud to show off these  
fingers, this cluttered mass of bones and dry things.  
Move over Vanna White! This chiffon  
death mask, a DVD of *The Graduate*, something  
on the green towards the conclusion of the end,  
something that won't show up on film or in print.  
At work or dinner at home, store some  
of these away and keep them for unexpected  
psychedelic highs, after party, herbs, relaxing.  
That's all, that's all, that's all right—  
just remove fish and accessories, wash and rinse.  
94% of organisms on the planet Earth  
of selected conferences are contractually  
obligated to understand nothing. This one's  
wife gave him swimming lessons as a Christmas present.

38

As if you belonged to history or “her story,” that mystery

From the age of 4 until about 18 I spent most every interstate journey waiting for burning neon red sauce to fully illuminate the sign which enumerated what was my skyline, to me.

I didn't know the U.S. Steel Tower or PPG Place, those places more important and airy than the building I knew, so solidly solid and made up of concrete and neon and ketchup.

I knew only this one and the city jail, two landmarks as much my city as they were my father's and my own.

My father spent years in the building beneath the sign, miserable 9-5 years for him that were even more than 9-5. He spent only two or three evenings in the other building, but received more thanks for it. At 6 it was a thrill to go to his office, to the cafeteria where I thought the ketchup packets must contain a product fresher than any place else in the world, where his secretary kept her row of tiny earrings that I envied and was forbidden. I had toured the factory, oh yes, I had seen the museum and the founders. I understood why

it was 57 and had tasted each new condiment and the soups, (which lived under secret names) and heard at night through the floor (while I read awake, working for something as yet unknown) the problems and difficulties of working for a goddamn asshole. In fact, it was Heinz that taught me how to stand up for myself, Heinz that taught me how to swear, that marked the only city I knew. That place that taught me how to leave with my body but without my history.

I know there are people who put ketchup

on each and every food, but as for me,  
I do not eat it.

39

Tracing our vagaries on the map

Grain feeding gives superior flavor  
and tenderness; raising children on a  
generous amount of fresh fruit and talk  
gives them years to recover and make it

back. They may be thawed in the fridge, sliced and  
served cold, or even moved upstairs again  
until the meat is done to taste and all  
the lost ones come home for beef stroganoff.

The filet deserves its reputation  
as the most tender— a soft place to lie  
and big on flavor, yet completely clean.  
It deserves to be held close and cooked rare.

The bones have been left in to hold in all  
the taste, the succor, the revolution.



40

And a presumption that once our eyes watered

Cold in the right way, cold where you can see  
better, cold like Hemingway meant when he  
said Cezanne must have been hungry to paint  
like he did, and that the paintings looked more

bright. I feel cold like that all the time but  
not nearly enough. A haiku I read  
once said when the fog lifted he was where  
he thought he was, but for me the fog is

ever and is empty and it will not  
pass. In this haze I fade on occasion.  
I may be gone long but always I push  
against it, heaving towards the moment

that is ephemeral and now, never,  
lusting to make you shiver and tear with  
me. I need to fill, to feel you, need you  
to sup not from my breast but from my word

and hand. I need not nestle you into  
sleep but wish instead to wake you at once,  
electric and forever, jolted to  
the height of feeling, feeding, hearing. I

am trying desperately to figure, to reason in  
whatever way I can. Yes, maybe  
I am too consumed by this one thing, this  
life and the things in it which burn to the

touch. But the burn is what I lust for, what  
is the only and the one thing I crave—

to starve, alone and mute.

Then, at last, to slake my thirst and speak.