Love Letter for an Obscure Poet

Today I'll take it slow. I'll wait outside—the mist unclings its cape of lilac-greys. Your gloves on the sill are catching the light from the Ascension's stained glass—I pause as one does when there's news to come and everything keeps shifting. Or when one's learnt that words are not accountable to an ascendant sign, or a fixed luminary, but are ever-changing in timbre and forecast—the choral drawl before the oboe breaks in. When the hand lifts in the mind's ready-altar, it's like the tender shift of a mother's script across the page—"Renounce," it says—"Speak not of love, but of vanishings. I'm the slow amber on the pitted flagstone, the faintest echo on your aching palm—

On Absence

after W.B. Yeats

The pond isn't a lake.
The water broods in turbid green—the lady of the pond
is a tarnished Venus—
perhaps in the sculptor's mind, her nipples were
clotting against the cold,
hair cascading in auburn—
but all these years, she's been so
stiff in stony glaze,
her seashell a dripping fountain—
goddess of the already-
seen, too much living has splattered
you with pigeon shit, lichen.

The pond isn't a lake.
The alien reeds, stowed in a manger
of stuttering sun-light, below the nameless
trees, whose leaves are
never in the act of swirling, but
almost tapered in the water's skim.

If I could write the scarlet bill, the feathered
black that glides unseen—if
I could salvage an image
from the litmus-mauve of the mind in flight—
what a gift—
not only to graze the water's
wound, but here and *here*, where the soul
is—to come eye to eye with the algae whose
bloom isn't just murk and
filth—to taste the ever-
darkening of green on brown on turbid greens—

If I could say the pond is—
not a lake, but of a darkness
formless, inchoate—
that it conjures webbed feet
that it drills the water's surface—
a bell-beat lifting silt, plankton,
something unnameable—
perhaps, a flap of mighty wings, a kick
in the almost amniotic
deep, the memory of something
hovering—

Little crow, you may go

for a poet - 'inħossni vulnerabbli u nibża ħafna'[1]

wuthering inside the leaf
blueing in your paper-black heart – all you
want is an open window – shall I
call it casement or crumbling
tower, this yearning by which you
know the moors from the thistled
shawl of night or the fear that
flows between the dandelion and its
almost invisible flight?

Little one, once the voices come, will they
ever leave, and if the breeze
shatters your heart, must you also be
split by lightning, left
stumbling in the crippled dark –
might I not speak to you when you're gone,
spy the flesh in its feathered
prayer, each syllable tearing
open a distilled sky?

[1] Maltese for 'I feel vulnerable and am full of fears.' The source is a secret letter from one dead poet to another.

Rooting for the Story

I love you, pure land, like so many
contrary things I have loved
(Pablo Neruda, *Canto General*, XXXVII, trans. by Mariela Griffor and Jeffrey Levine)

Desert's a fit of wind, a burning bush which
sends her chasing after wastelands,
blue stars, salt crackling in the rock-face,
a great expanse of feathergrass,
sometimes a symphony of pinks and greys–
a primeval insect in the shape of a drone,
or a cyclist who knows
the answer to a question she hasn't yet posed:
"Both paths lead to San Pedro"—

Mad ride into the howl of her story where
a skeletal car sheds bones on a desert byway,
driver high on booze and coke,
cigarette in hand, reverse gear dysfunctional —
propelled by dust and volcanic rage—
here, where one body will want another,
where force fields waltz like meteorites
before the crash, their bright interstellar weight drawing magnets
hooked to the museum's glass case—sometimes,
attaching themselves loosely, other times,
drawn so tightly, they can hardly be
wrenched apart.

crow & eight erasures on crow

who ministers in light[2] whose[3] ravenous[4] beak will peck at the sky whose rivering is molten whose wings span the holly's poison who'll stomach salt and volcanic ash who warns the *fageda* of my approach who sheds leaves like frost who caws in my dreams who queens the forested city who comes flying over desert[5] landscapes who'll swear at the moon who gloats off the silvering bark who fasten[6]s the wind to its wondering eye who leaves each twig in a[7] flurry of fire who

wants to enter this poem who breaks breaks but[8] cannot open who caws my fears to the mountains who grows basalt on its throat whose kind can draw flesh from carrion whose mating robs ferns of fractal delight whose fury will vomit a kernel of sky who'll whisper about beginnings whose heart is a chalice who offers nothing to strangers who writes me in *medias res* who steals from the eagle's mouth who'll teach murder to fledglings who scavenges for buried words who knows the beech like its seasons who wrecks my night with its flutterings whose wing is a terrible absence whose flight is a looping sand dune who

lives in the spate of the brain whose eye is the bead of doubt who's witnessed the unfolding who says I cannot write who followed the woman on her bike who broke faith[9] with the light who'd have pecked at her broken lip who knew she was coming home who watched from a volcanic peak who heard but did not speak of the woman-whose-cell-phone-channelled-the-moon whose blood stained the salt flats whose ancestors wept at the *algarrobo* whose body entered the Southern Cross whose flesh is to feather what silt is to sand—

crow who knows better than a pack of dogs who dive-bombs for facts whose eyes are tattooed on the woman's arm who knows men are crueller than beasts who can tell a lie from its odour whose feathering spans the Atacama whose stealth is as ancient as Licancabur who knows accident from murder who spells demise with its claws who says *come alone if you must* who gifts back what it takes whose language is a broken covenant who mourns the fallen beech who knows the sickness is in the air who sits on the shoulder of the fated who takes her home one night whose word is this broken story

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[2] light stained the fallen
[3] whose molten body is this
[4] ravenous words at her broken lip
[5] desert enters in *media res*
[6] fasten will to the bead of doubt
[7] a poem scavenges for flesh
[8] but who spells back this broken
[9] faith pecked its claws one night