

## Formulae

### *Sestet on the Customs of Death*

In the dream a hand  
silent as a pressed azalea unbuttons your night-  
dress. As fair as water is, to wash the body  
first it must be dressed in honey, then in isinglass.  
All there is to happiness, I have at last  
mastered: a silver bell, a clock, a bag of wheat pennies heavier than your eyes.

### *Sestet on the Close Stars*

The sky keeps the oldest stories—the archer, the serpent, a bull's bloodshot eye.  
I learned to map them early, the planetariast's hand  
tracing the cross of Cygnus on the ceiling, its atlasted  
wings—my mother in bathrobe and lace, taking me out into a night  
green and clouded as depression glass.  
Among the animals, king lights, I fought to fit their fire inside my body.

### *Sestet I Have Remembered*

We come to learn the body,  
if trained, can be tricked. When I was nine, I studied Magic Eye  
pictures: tessellated starfish, astral shards and violet glass—  
each embedded with an oak tree or a fisted hand.  
Pressed into the cold-smelling paper, my vision blurred nightly—  
fat stone upon stone, calculated ivy—until I could see through them at last.

*Sestet for Catherine Chislova*

Tulle and slippers, flame-blushed, the dancer at last  
chases the light. In the language of candles we come to know the body—  
wax dripped in the shape of an anchor means at night  
the man you love is faithful. His eyes  
watching only the clocked arc of your hand  
rising to balance, your calf straight and tapered, secret as a spyglass.

*Sestet after the Fairy Tales*

In a land and time that could never be, there was once a city made of glass.  
Cathedral and ibis, in the light of the skyline, at last  
the people looked down at their hands—  
their bodies  
visible now—and broke the curse with their flesh. I  
was there—though only a nursling—as a hundred years passed in one night.

*Sestet at Johnstown, 1889*

When the South Fork Dam rent, Anna Fenn Maxwell saw the wet night  
of death—debris and fire carried on a chariot of waves—and in the rising, glass-  
tossed water gathered her seven children to her, their fingers white deletions clinging to her dress.  
But she could not save them all: their eyes  
began to close in pairs, soundlessly, until they let go at last.  
Anna—washing her elbows, the taste of accident on her tongue like blood, the bodies  
of her children floating quietly in a circle—felt for her heart, and there it was: still loud and  
metered beneath her hand.

*Tercet Disclosing the Conditions of Winter*

If a potato when peeled reveals three eyes that beneath the tongue taste of night.  
If a girl's glass hand shatters as she picks the leaves from a sword-tipped fern.  
If the body, at last, can be stolen. Can be governed. And in one swollen word  
    can be saved.

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