

JANIS BUTLER HOLM

Bother

“What do you want? Is the poem a pony?”
—Rachel Blau DuPlessis, “Draft 9: Page”

I

The word is my leopard.

Spaces between
are yielding
to vertigo.

I shell nuts, gaunt.

Darks of misgrace.

*We take meth, pee,
shoo flies, drown
in mean raptures.*

Those seismic nude grievances
have their indifferences.

*We pee meth, flee,
deride the sbrill otters.*

Close your cellar-door
splendor. Sing the result.

We adore meth, lie cold.

II

When you cling, I want spires or infinite potato cake. The kind I can barter. Why the hell not? Thirty ways to pick the fuzz from old books and radios. What's left for looking isn't a clue.

If slack skin's your metaphor, choose the banana bread. As if words were fingers. Ha. Odalisque this. It's not what I respected, but tell me whenever. Just another detail for the socially blank.

You're saying what's she got that I can happily exonerate. Maybe yellow birds or other rough trade. Azure, as you like it. Like I care about caring. Maybe our sponsor had the ugly ones dumped.

You're stupid or snappy or possibly history. How not to murmur while the rest of it grows. That's what they get for charming my envelope. Consider the hassle: spitting out flak.

III

Er erquicket meine Seele.

We cooed
and delivered.

Li fè m' reprann fòs.

My little
scud epistle.

Confortará mi alma.

She yearns for the clamor
of mountainous roadies,
all squeaky-mean
in extravagant pants.

IV

On those three ____ hang all my ____ and all my ____ when it comes to ____ the ____ for ____ . I trust to be able to remember the ____ for a ____ or an exclamation ____, or a question ____ to mark the ____ of my ____, or a ____ when, in rare ____, I want to introduce a formal ____ or ____ .

Can we not induce them to remember the exterior ____, and to think so clearly that only an occasional ____ will become necessary, and to see that, when the ____ *does* demand a ____, it is to be used, not as a ____ possessing ____ in itself, any more than ____, but because without it some ____ may not possess sufficient suggestive ____, and to feel that a straight ____ often conveys an ____ better than a ____ of explanatory ____? Or must we go on giving the ____ ____ in ____ by ____ and continue to wonder why they do not see that they are not punctuating with ____? *

V

After sunrise,
a sky of guitars.

Plunder the goat,
or plunder the pack.

When are calliopes
rounder than silver?

Whose blunt ornament,
guttery psalm?

VI

redolent quiver
gordo lapis
 crypt *Dasein*
Urdu fragment
 shift
 languor *merde*
apostate stick
 et

VII

A meandering of ciphers, curly and straight, a consequence of memory
where hair categories and quiet dislike make an excelsior, cushioning reliance
on telltale encounters that could be enough, however hard you struggle to
mount the thick air.

VIII

Yesterday rained more gladly.
His fear held clever color.
They were dear in a bad way.
You wore your skin aloft.

* This text derives from E. Dudley Parsons's "Bowing Down before the God of Punctuation," *English Journal* 4 (1915): 598-99.