

Fetch

TAMAR YOSELOFF was born in the US in 1965. Her first collection, *Sweetheart* (Slow Dancer Press, 1998) was a Poetry Book Society Special Commendation and the winner of the Aldeburgh Festival Prize. She received a New Writers' Award from London Arts for her second collection, *Barnard's Star* (Enitharmon Press, 2004). In 2005 she was Writer in Residence at Magdalene College, Cambridge, as part of their Year in Literature Festival. She is the Programme Co-ordinator and a tutor for The Poetry School. She divides her time between London and Suffolk, and is currently working on her first novel.

Also by Tamar Yoseloff

Barnard's Star (Enitharmon Press, 2004)

Sweetheart (Slow Dancer Press, 1998)

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TAMAR YOSELOFF



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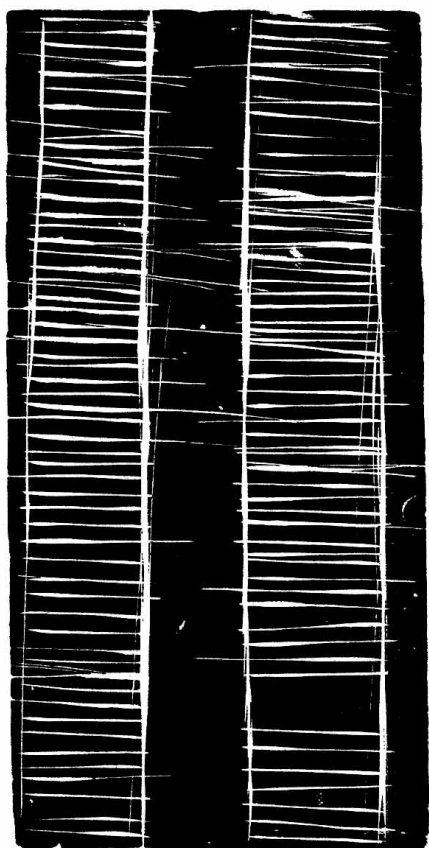
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Marks is also published as a limited edition Poetry Pamphlet and as an artist's book with images by Linda Karshan by Pratt Contemporary Art in 2007. www.prattcontemporaryart.co.uk

And my gratitude to Sheenagh Pugh, for sending me her Fetch.

Fetch

- n. 1. A stratagem by which a thing is indirectly brought to pass, or by which one thing seems intended and another is done; a trick; an artifice.
2. C17: of unknown origin. The apparition or double of a living person; a wraith.



Fetch

I send her out
into the cold dark night.
She rides a bus to the edge
of town, enters a bar.

See her hair, nearly black
in the dim room, skin
translucent. She orders a beer,
downs it in one.

The men sit with their backs
against the wall, watch her
order another, cross
the floor, take a seat,

while I am safe
at home, wondering if I should
cut my hair – too long, I think
as I catch myself in the mirror.

She smiles at her reflection
in the jukebox, the glare of neon
like a halo, plays with a strand of hair,
chooses *Are You Lonesome Tonight?*

A quarter clinks into the slot,
the mechanical hand lifts
the black disc, slips it in place.
The arm swivels over

needle poised. The men
check out her ass, her legs.
Skirt's too short, I think,
pulling mine over my knees.

Polaroid

Far too bright, the Technicolor
version of my life, I shake it and
appear as if by magic, that happy child.

If I say *blue*, what do I mean?
An indigo sea, a lapis sky,
a mood too deep to fathom.

If I say *keepsake*, will you produce
a shock of hair held in a locket,
a blossom flattened in a book?

The brilliant moment drained to grey.
Faces rise from murky water,
undefined, the names have seeped away.

Illumination

Gold leaf, cadmium, ochre, saffron—
indelible once set on vellum.

The monks ground azurite and lapis
for perfect blue, took care

to cleanse their hands of poison
that made words sacred.

We place our fingers against
each other's lips, a vow of silence,

sense the touch mark even after.
I am brimming with words

but none can hold that moment
when our faces, edged in gold

glinted in the water's mirror,
the invisible sun within us—

so I let them fly, lead white
against a white sky.

Shadow

. . . how can a man throw his shadow, make this the illumination of his experience, how put his weight exactly—there?

— CHARLES OLSON

When we look back it is there, that
darkness of ourselves born
of days when the sun was blinding.

I trace what's left on the pavement
where you walked, schist or shit,
your heavy feet relearning those lost steps,

a dance we moved to once,
a shadow play in liquid streetlight,
late lamps, sodium glow of stars.

What mattered was matter, the precise
weight of you, so many ounces
of flesh and blood,

your hand on my shoulder, solid
and light like music,
our empty glasses on the table,

beakers for what cannot be
contained; the feather
of our lips, our touch.

The Seal

The horizon was low that day, the dull coast,
the curve of a mouth at the bay, the estuary flowing
to meet the sea. A weak sun, but it was late

when we arrived to an almost deserted beach;
wet sand sucked at our boots, then gave up their prints
in an instant—the way a beach

renews itself, a slate dragged clean by the pull
of the tide, the cycle of life and death and life
played small under rocks and in pools

swirling with opaque crabs, sea skaters,
a perfect ecosystem we disturbed to find our own rock,
smooth and flat, shaped to hold our bodies.

At first we thought he was another rock, just visible
on the surface, until he flipped over, one huge eye
a vitrine for the world beneath the waterline,

a shipwrecked treasure. He was the colour
of the stones you skimmed, your arm flashing out,
the colour of the rock we clung to, foam lapping our feet.

We sat there until shadows stretched the length of the shore
to the town, where people hurried along, held
in the tide of clocks and plans. The picture dissolves

like an underwater shell: the sky darkens, stars
rubbed out by cloud, the seal slips into an ink-black sea,
the memory of him sinking even as we take our leave.

Gorse

I breathe its scent, like sweat
on skin. The rain has brought it out.
Yellow settles on my scarf, too yellow,
a warning. Its branches shimmer water,
buds tight to bursting. Beyond the green stem,
its lobed leaves, I can see the thorns, daggered
in branches that anchor it to earth.
It owns this place.

I would like to plant
my fingers deep like roots, spread
like a dark stain, vigorous and hearty.
I would like to shed my petals, my silk touch,
before the final sharp prick
that draws blood. I trespass here,
I am only passing through. I close
my eyes and see an afterlight, a shock of yellow.

Spring

(after Barbara Hepworth)

Look at the way we
complicate our lives, shape
smooth hard surfaces, frame something
that gives, could collapse
if we're not careful.

We pull strings
taut, construct ourselves, little puzzles,
we have no end. But then the breeze rustles
the copper beech, everything's in bloom—
it could break our hearts.

Careful.

This stone is my anchor—
shimmering with tiny minerals,
beautiful in this light.

I must feel its heft
inside my palm, put my cheek
against its cool curve,
hold it close.

St Ives

And here we are again, the end of summer:
sky's a clean slate, a lighthouse leans
on its rock, coal smoke drifts over the toppled roofline.
The hills disappear, white on white, dull pearl
prised from an oyster.

The hierarchy of boats:
dinghies, trawlers, cruisers. Bobbing like apples
in a bucket. They imagine the open sea,
a voyage; they are tied to their moorings
with elaborate knots.

From this window: curtains
partly drawn, the coffee in the mugs
stone cold, the tiny union jack
the only colours in the world.

The Beginning of Winter

(after Laforgue, Bell and O'Brien)

I will go numb until summer, how else
to get through the next five months of rain?
The weatherman has a special map of Britain
just for this—black clouds over every city
and three over London.

Outside, buses slur their reds over tarmac,
slick coats pass with no heads, their owners
bent double in the wind, hoping to be blown
home, where the smell of cabbage is a comfort,
where the news is full of war again,

children go missing, pensioners go blue,
corporations sink; plus the usual Christmas reruns:
Morecombe and Wise, Tommy Cooper, Bob Monkhouse,
still living inside the TV, the ghosts of the front room.
No shaking the dead—they're on every channel.

I sleep all day, like the cat, and dream of rain,
a world turned flood plain, the joke
of a god who invented global warming, only here
it isn't warm. The leafless trees glisten,
their trucks silky with blackness.

And why go out? The shops are full
of jeans that are pre-distressed, with pre-made holes
(and I think of the girl on TV
shot trying to leave the settlement, lying in the road),
and, of course, camouflage again.

It will never stop—the rain, the war,
the test match (in rerun), the refugee
sent back, the rebranding, the market research,
the Brazilian supermodel, the kickback,
the freedom fries, the disgraced MP.

The rain is almost pretty, hanging
in lacy drops from the handrail, and I think
of it raining over the hills and into valleys,
on the tin roofs of makeshift factories,
on the postman as he delivers the mail,

on the funeral procession, the big parade,
the wino in the doorway, the M25,
the 747, a man I used to love, and it's comforting,
the democracy of everything being drenched
at the same time. God, give me the strength

for Spring, all that chirping and newness,
baby bunnies, too much pink. Let winter last
forever, now that I have settled into
the dark afternoon and central heating and the sharp note
of the singer as he moves into a minor key.

Interior with a Woman Playing the Virginals

Emanuel de Witte (c. 1660)

I played all morning, my fingers
light on the keys like birds. I wanted him
to love the full song I offered:

my husband was in the low countries
on business, this would never happen again,
I told myself, to have him so.

The maid kept busy in the hall, he stayed
behind the curtain while I played, but
I could smell him— frankincense, candlewax, sweat

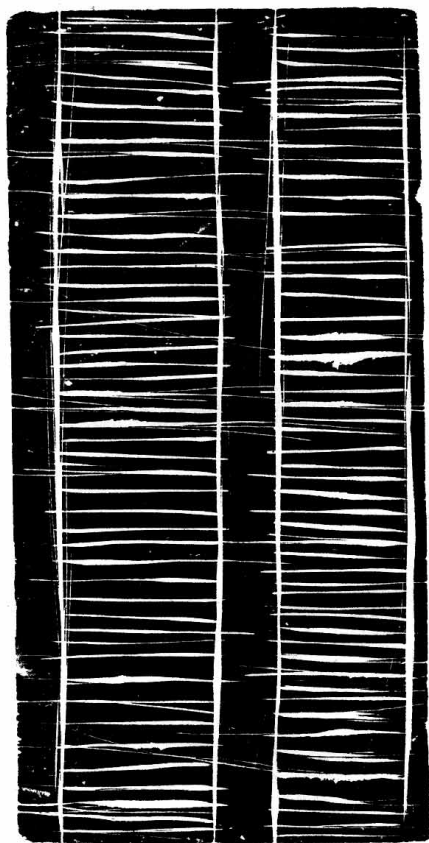
and I swear it made my song dearer.
I played for him to keep him sweet,
I gave myself, like a sweetmeat on a plate.

He said words no man has said before,
and I was in love with him that moment
and for the hour he spent inside my chamber.

But a man like that is hard to hold, a bird
in the hand, so I let him go. He tipped his hat,
strolled into the afternoon. Now I am alone—

My chamber is as I'd left it,
the pitcher on the table full of daylight,
the mirror empty of a face,

and through the door,
the mop and pail wait patiently
to absolve the remnants of my folly.



Fetch

I choose her uniform—
sunglasses, trenchcoat.
She needs to lose herself
in a crowd, to be invisible.

She enters Main Street
at 2:32 p.m. precisely,
sidewalk slick with rain,
sights him moving south.

Easy to spot in a crowd:
I'd know the arc of his shoulders,
his particular, easy gait,
from a mile away.

She must report
where he goes, who he meets,
if he still wears that blue shirt.
She's made for this,

tails him like a cipher,
a girl he might think
he knows from somewhere,
but can't quite place.

She keeps her distance
like I taught her, hugs the walls,
will duck into a doorway
the exact moment he turns.