

# Bits and Pieces



*Rosmarie Waldrop*

1.

Bits and pieces, you say, scratching your beard. That's what there is. Stalks rising in the air as if gravity did not exist. Roots, dirt, turtles, elephants. Because the singular wastes territory we try to link it to galaxies or melting ice. For a coherent universe. But not dense enough to attract, mere pieces, always, just as they were. Is this why we have offspring? Why I say *my* hand, *my* foot, to make them more intimately felt than objects usually are in the mind? Can the witness of the body undo isolation?

2.

This almost physical wanting of continuity, if possible, happiness. It makes us smooth over the gaps with a twist of muscle on a field of error. We call it instinct, and it spreads like a heatwave. Even to the distant mountain whose slopes seem softer for being beyond touch. But our ambitions contradict one another: you also love this particular patch of blue in the sky. You fear debris in the brain will bury this one insistent hydrangea that stands out from the sprawl of

green. You say hydrangea. And again: hydrangea. As if the intensity of the word could keep the plant in bloom.

3.

If memory serves, it was five years ago that yours began to refuse. Is it now like crossing from an open field into the woods, the sunlight suddenly switched off? Or like a roof without edge or frame, pushed sideways in time? Like the flashes in which we think we possess though never quite reach ourselves? Yet today is today. And you receive it, if in pieces. Likewise words. If intermittently. Then you let them move over your tongue and hold their possible bodies in both hands.

4.

It seemed almost personal when the sun was eclipsed. As if visibility were like your memory, or the moon's shadow the cataract on my eye. Observing the latter did not make it pass. Unlike when a fright resolves into the joy of not yet. I keep on standing as I've learned to, having feet. Though electrons degenerate and the knife-edge is moving closer. I treasure the residues of love's radiation, put on sneakers and wait for the form of rejection to come. Whether you'll no longer know my name or walk out of your body, I anticipate I'll swallow. As if it were a hard object.

5.

Meanwhile you cling to your book. Do the words still float you to Prospero's island? Or drop, separate coins, bringing no dew from the Bermudas? I put my hope in the fundamental difference between local time and time at a distance. Make a show of clearly contoured identity, no matter if you can connect it to family structure. A stable body with only occasional modification. Rather than molecules and feelings in violent agitation. Let alone quanta dissolving into vibrations of light. You stare at your left little finger, which is crooked.

6.

Veins visible under your skin, translucent. The first stage of a fare-thee-well? Cypress, pine, yew, taxus, the evergreen punctuation of our final sentence? Elsewhere, in territories off the map, does time warp, whirl, meander, fold, get trapped in wormholes? Careen into complexities of curves and lives we will not have? Here, the clocks are synchronized with dusty noise. And breath is short. I count the pulse pushing through my neck and try to match it to your breathing. The escape velocity of the unknown.

7.

Perhaps if we had dark-adapted eyes. The shadows would not overtake us. And you could brush your teeth without fearing for their skin. Add the conjunction of being prudent, and night broader and deeper. Because you are still within it. Could this not disperse the threat? As in a mirror? Could it not offer the possibility that your illness, even if deliberate in its purpose, need not proceed in a straight line? Could slow in the gravitational drag of my body?

8.

Am I trying to write my anxieties down into the deep of the paper? In such a way that I could draw them back inside me? Completely? This has nothing to do with poetry, but perpetuates denial and mental reservations. To my surprise you say that even blind with incomprehension, we must. Trust the words we still have. With their tangled depths and roots. To house the world in the complex of our feeling. As if they could love us.