

PIANO SUITE

1. *Prelude And Fugue No. 2 In C Minor, The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I*

She attacks gently. *Pianissimo* sings
just to me. Hands curve till ivory breathes
into my ear the clear and private slang
that each note cradles. As her song bathes

my fever, which I cache within my secret
book of fugues, I spread pages like thighs to the sleek
second voice, counterpoint and sweat. Eye sockets
vibrate a dull electric. Our skins unlock

for the diffusing of soul in C minor.
Her fingers hammer keys, almost frighten
me. The tempo quickens. Sick from our manner
of desire, while spaces between notes fatten

against clefs, pulling their key like a tether,
I drink song, soothing as the croon of a mother.

2. *Appassionata*

Hungry to lose my self, I twist at the dial.
The sonata makes my window rattle,
high fidelity speakers buzzing. Defiled
music, never meant to crash so loud, straddles
a space that I will not fill between scuttled
hope for lullaby and buttocks slick with sweat,
between *adagio* lowing that cattle
ease to a manger and oil gracing a svelte

haunch, glory on all fours. The sonata swells.
Fingers clasp sound as though tender ears, urging
short hard pulls, quick repetitions disfigured
in high volume, skin prickled by the sweltered
motif, more lovely than hymns of a virgin
yielding to abandon, lost in my hunger.

3. *We Shall Come Rejoicing*

What does it mean to touch sound? to let song master
this most intimate sense? taken, to take in pitch
through muscle and bone? I have faced my ritual
joy, the introit played by the wife of the pastor.

What chord progression formed her structure of power?
I have walked the long aisle. At each step I missed her.
The hymnal she submitted distorts to faster
form, modulations woven as wild cells flower,

sacrament of union, the rite of last posture,
kneeling. To touch God's pleasure, like a nipple rich
with blood, knotted by love's perfect heat, to smear sour
milk a musician clotted in her worst hour
how shall I touch sound? A high-strung flesh, a tight-stretched
clay, recites the tumor I stole from her Psalter.

4. *Offertory*

This gift I have of hands, of touch, troubles me.
I learned it in the school of hymns. The sweet flame
she drove like God's breath into piano keys

still arcs knuckle, arcs nerve tunneled through the wrist,
arcs muscle strung along the spine, lays its blame
in the palm I hold out as though to be blessed,

and I am, but it troubles me, this dense mass
I heft. Her common time rippled God's pure name
for the body, for the blood, and tasting glass

broken for me brings back salt beaded like oil
anointing an ugly head until she came,
and the congregation looked away, my toil

in the engine of praise hidden by the same
veil that hides my glory-ravaged face, my shame.

5. *Cancer Keeping Time*

The time I woke up praying from a dream
of music laid out in a string of half-notes
flawless as pearls. The time that time rubatoed
from adrenaline to incarnadine.

The time a secret metronome flowed low
through an open wrist. The time I woke up
praying my darkest truth, caught in the long

slow slide to the black mass, *I want to live*,
saying my secret, all secrets coalesced
into one, *I want to live*, from a dream
of a broken keyboard. The time she blasphemed
down the staves of my hymn, my life a ransom
for hers. The time wild cells sowed her desire
to die throughout her metronome's strict measure.

6. *Isaac's Blues*

All music flows out of muscle,
cartilage, and bone. Each instrument
mimics voice. This vault, carved in gristle,
resounds the drone that the supplicant
thundered up from her hands, ligaments
strung like hammered wire, a gift given
skin to skin, in din, in dissonance,
in exaltation, in salt. Sickened
beyond my despair, she opened
herself, God's torn vein, poured out her praise.
And this gristle drank. Scored and stricken,
it hid our bruise-dark chord until it raised
her same livid blade and severed
my self from I AM's healing pleasure.

7. *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*

I am the gentlest person I know.

The school of hymns was not all bad. I learned
adagio there, not just hate, slow
movement, a dove falling like fire to burn

back to life a murdered tongue. I learned speech
then, and song, deeper than I took the way
to crucifixion. This death rant I preach
is just old fear making noise, how I bay

at a moon I can't call back and don't want,
really, full as a breast heavy with milk.
I have love, music, handed like a blunt
instrument mother to son, fine as silk

thread in a blouse taut with promise, gentle
as grunts huffed by stunned and crumpling cattle.

8. *War And Rumors Of War*

The time I betrayed her with *I want to live*
I became a whore. Jezebel. Cunt. Bad
boy! Bad! Deepest seed for the cancer called love
and Babylon's violence enter the bed
where I barter I AM, stained acrid with bride-
salt and feces. The time I betray her beats
in me like a metronome. Count each broad
wave, systolic, diastolic, that berates
in the language of self-loathing. Don't believe

want kills the secret the body tells the soul.
I believe, kneeling to false worship, bereft
of body and blood. I bend over, for sale.
But I cannot kill I AM. In part, I choose,
I do not choose. I will lose until I lose.

9. *Etudes*

Kneeling is the meat of worship. The body tells
the soul. I have entered forbidden land and touched
the dark place and beaten common time with my fist.
I have returned. I barter stolen tune, secrets.

The body tells. The soul uneasy. She said *kneel*
and I got down, hungry and humble as a child.
I was a child. The song belonged to me, plundered
as she taught touch to my fingers. I mumble my

tumor if No One listens. I let my chills shake
me if No One comes near. I trade my secrets one
by one, lessening my burden, reclaiming praise.
I am glad *I AM* is hungry to hear my prayer.

Everyday I say *I AM*, let thanks cleanse my mouth.
A body shouts my fugue in the house of the Lamb.

10. *Counterpoint*

I am the gentlest person I know. Pulpits
and pastors' wives. I acknowledge my hatred
before God. Drinking from the altar. Puppets
and parlor tricks. Piano lessons. Mated
pairs. Afternoon relief. I enter belief
in No One, fevers, secret matrix of cancer
knotting a pancreas into a dense mass. I AM.
Whore. Girlchild. She is dead. I heft it again.
Her piano is silent. The slaughterhouse
echoes. I acknowledge my brokenness before God.
And hammer blows. The last of the fatted calf
congeals in the skillet. Begin by stealing. Answers.
Healing comes without magic and everything
is miracle. I still miss her music.