

Beyond the Fire

Also by Mary Leader

Red Signature

The Penultimate Suitor

Beyond the Fire

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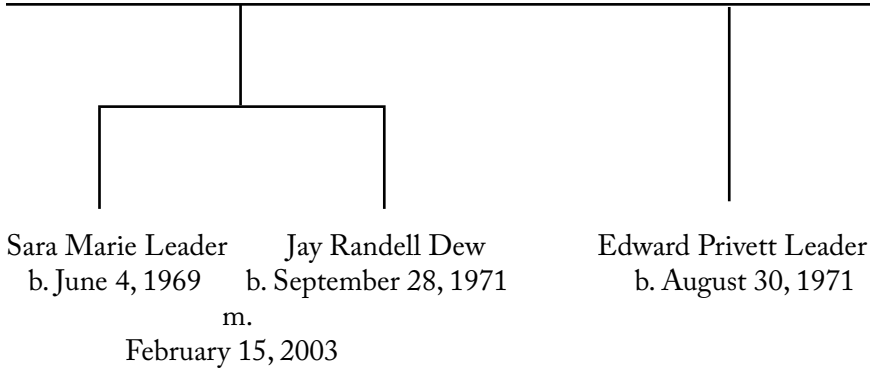
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for



*And then bargain wth y^e wind
To discharge what is behind.*

—George Herbert, “L’Envoy”

I.

Tallit with Stripes from the Book of Judges

There was this place famous for its dye, the most
Prized of which was blue. The fabrics often came out
Fuchsia or marine or morocco or bruise or lavender.
The fences and furrows were a brownish blue.
Storms and berries were the exact colors of each other.

And every warrior among the returning wears

A prey of divers colours of needlework

A certain occupied barn was especially purple
Because a little girl there knew all about adult love affairs.
The grown woman there knew a cold, vengeful rage.
One time the girl hanged herself from a violet rafter
When she had had about all she could take. The woman
Climbed up and lifted the body from the noose.
She sprinkled it liberally with a clear liquid. Then
A little repentance entered the woman's heart,
But too late: the girl had already come back to life.
In a perfect fury they fought, tooth, nail, and shuttle,
And with the most marvelous results. Once the mad
Shredding was over and done with, two piles of threads,
Verily heaps of skeins, beautiful, lay.

The pair set to work. Girls and women elsewhere
Likewise set up their looms, stretched the warp
Good and tight, and their cloth was in no way inferior.
But nothing lasts forever, especially preparation.
Sad come the days of greatest relief and happiness
When men's mothers strain at festooned windows,

Of divers colours of needlework on both sides,

Meet for the necks of them that take the spoil.

The fences and furrows were a bluish brown.
Storms and berries were the exact opposite of white.
The fabrics came out fuchsia, morocco, or marine,
Bruise, lavender, or maroon. But the most prized was blue.
There was a city, famous for its dye.

Poem

Brittle. Wind is old news. But it is my

news nonetheless today when I say it.

They come, they blow, minutes; they are dry, dry,

they skedaddle across the white-dashed line.

Leaf scraps, leaf spinal cords. I'm a woman

not like, but with, the season concluding.

Leaves, leaves brittle-blown aslant the highway

not for the first time nor yet for the last.

Turtles and porcupines are part of it,

then entrails tattered. The crows' part of it

Enacts itself moving before car-roar

which I, machination, energy, and

Materials cause. Crows lift but return

right after. Thus they make their livelihood.

Bride, Wife, Widow

I adore the way
He hums when he shaves, his
Deep voice, his small, lotioned hands.

I detest the way he hums when he shaves,
His deep voice, his small
Lotioned hands.

I miss the way he hummed
When he shaved, or did any
Small thing with his hands.

Education for the Likes of Civilization

I have one I stitched when I was a little girl,
One I stitched when I was a teenager,
And one that somebody else stitched, which
Hung on the wall in my Granny's dining room.

"Stitched" is the term, not "sewed," for samplers.
I mention it because it is the same
Word the Greeks had for poetry, somehow.
Hemi-stichs. Something like that. I forget.

Wait a second. Is it "stitched" or is it "worked"?
I was supposed to know that, but I forgot.

De minimus non curat lex.

The law does not take account of trifles.

Small things are not dealt with by law.
If I make things small enough, I can escape.
If I make things as big as I like, I am in
Trouble. Blue is prettier but red is better.

Linen Repeatedly Folded

I am an old woman bare to the waist with red-orange flowers in her hair
It may be possible to deconstruct them
Fruitfully I am
A little girl but my present tense is a globe

I am a little girl bare to the waist with red-orange flowers in her hair
What luck to be talking early
I am an old woman as you know but
I am almost finished with the parallels

Right now in my bed is a shy ruddy girl
I see two graybeards of about the same height walking at the same pace
Together coming to see me but
I seem to have concluded that I am almost done with the parallels

Swans and a stag in the stream near the English village called Privett
So strange to me I barely say a word
Nor walk the herb-edged path to reach the Magen-David design
Nor touch the stele on which it is carved

Nor be offered the wine you buy to warm another woman's bloodstream
And although my present tense is not nebulous or noncommittal
I feel no glimmer of what it will be like when next I have clarity
The sun bounces blinding off a butter-knife blade

I am bare to the waist without red-orange flowers simple enough
Soon now the first cold days will come coughing
Like the man on Liebigstrasse with acne scars and tuberculosis
I had not yet understood that in the context of opposites I want to be

Well let me back up
I only know I mean to go farther
Will you also drop the negative valence with which trim is charged
I want to show you what happens when trim is operative

In the landscapes again the patches are present on the ground
Which is tilted up toward the eye rendering perspective suppressed
I agree with you that *Paysage de Champrovent* is particularly fine
Here is where I am feeling the pinch of e-mail

You are nodding or shaking your head quizzical or bored patient or not
I have seen you both of each of these
A figure is like a doll a chesspiece a candlestick in Balthus or the cat
Therefore there is much more room

The ages have this as their provinces surely the
Way a mother holds a baby incorporated into a breathlessly long series
So I am after eschewing the cult of the individual
I am sorry in different hands

As you said the old woman and the little girl being brought into proximity
Near but not identical
Intersecting triangles identical pieces in opposite positions interlocking
I am still confused about it and still involved with the parallels

But my present tense is becoming a globe
I can only hope that the amber pendant I ordered will arrive in time
The sun with its saber is poised
Rose Steinberg is my opposite name

Letter to Arkady Plotnitsky

Chicago, July, 2008

Germanium has indirect gaps.
Sun-points punctuate these geraniums.

Germanium can be doped with copper.
Geraniums can be red; these are.

Something about bulk germanium
As opposed to very very thin
Layers of it buried in silicon, measuring

Intensity against shift, then repeating
The measurements, Raman intensity, Raman

Shift, for various thicknesses of germanium
(Grown at different temps). Germanium and
Geraniums, then. Both said

To be grown. Paintings being flat should look
Flat. In lifeism, these geraniums

Are red and the fence behind them is blue-gray.
This coffee's wonderfully wonderfully bitter, 'tis.
Ramen noodles are good and cheap. It costs

Nothing to read these warm geraniums.
It costs zero to look at a library book:

The Principles of Physical Optics. If a painting
Looks like nothing so much as a painting,
That is the ultimate realism. That is why

I would paint these geraniums blue-gray
And the fence behind them red. Click on, click on.

Click on. Germanium may be ultrapure or
Germanium may be an impurity. Does Ga
Stand for Germanium? Does GaAs

Stand for Gap Absorption(s)? Kandinsky's
Painting *Waagrecht Blau* (1929).

Almost the whole painting is blue, but the small
Square is red and hence foregrounded. That
Is its/his prerogative. *Waagrecht Blau*

(Horizontal Blue). *Physical Optics*

WITH TEN PLATES AND 280 DIAGRAMS

Important as a cat's yawn, lovely and true.

Munich, July, 1913

“Surrounded, perhaps for the last time, by

The summer beauties of nature I send you and yours
A farewell greeting. Your old friend, Ernst Mach”