



*Valerie Fox*

THE GLASS BOOK  
[ L I T E ]

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## THEY KNOW ABOUT FISH

There are these two fishermen. This isn't the first time. A series of terraces. The people adopt them as pets and put them on TV. There are things called tables and desks with things called computers on them. Smudges on bottles and the glasses of the weary fishermen get in the way of their fuller understanding.

A debacle has been scheduled for 11:45 for the two fishermen to tell their salty stories. The people fall down in their headlong desire for love. Or what some might call their one hope (whistling in the background).

A rich man and a poor one talk on the square about the state of the fish, the oceans, and the software industry. Their talk turns to aphorisms. Didn't one of our poets say something about the poor hating the poor more than the rich hating the poor?

Then, the true part is how the people follow around the two fishermen who end up being small men, merely disguised as clever and romantic outdoorsmen who know how to survive in extremest conditions.

People are planning out in their heads now how to memorialize the two who wandered up into their once sleepy town. By names and by fish. *I say to my wife, see them there, they think that they have no secrets. But don't we all?*

## THE CORNMEAL CEILING, THE FURRY COUCH

Look at him or her over there. He's probably somebody else, or wishes it. And that child seems capable of caring for herself when not lost in a sea, vast, of marginalia.

I'm in a Greyhound, next to a young nun and she's anxious to get back home. Bewildered, like our grandparents at the end of their day, minus the aching arms. The driver states his position on the selfish gene. Alone in a premonition of meekness, barely even a story.

There's a scarecrow without any clothes on in front of St. Anne's. There are falling rocks. Initials scrawled on the overlook near a sandy incline people try to play softball on.

Time is slow but it can always get slower.

It isn't retro, or chic, never will be. It's not a viable farmhouse and no one wants to buy it. If you play the tape backwards it's still about the Vietnam War. If you keep the fire going all night you smell like smoke. Everything is performed on its proper day. If you fall asleep once too often you pay for it, you pay for it.

We seldom explored the outside garage. The weeping willow was our best room. A lot of young men attended the seminaries.

The seminaries were full. The coffin factory didn't make it, business left—

Disregard the crooked timeline. This could've happened behind thick walls inside a house by Hopper. When he peopled his pictures, the artist and his wife gave us names.

The cornmeal ceiling, the furry cushions on the abrasive, L-shaped lounge set in the front room, a pocket dictionary in the blood-smelling cellar, a pre-electric washing machine, irises, daybreaks.

## A TRUE STORY

There's a man.

There's a man waiting. He's pointing at his left wrist with his right index finger. Oh look, there's a man she hasn't seen for years.

She seems to have caught the dishtowel on fire. It's in London. There are train tracks. Once he wrote a story about a man jumping in front of a train and not reaching the other side. The title of the story was the title of an FM radio song.

Many of us wrote that story, naming our Mary, our Matthew, and our Mark.

There's a man and he proposes to a woman over the telephone and they get married instantly.

There's a woman she's getting older. There's a man he's getting younger.

Stark ads in the train with cheese shaped like the nodding, smiling moon and the stars.

Children in a circle play spin the bottle until they start to die off, mostly of old age.

There is a spate of movies about gin.

He is her salt and she is his pepper and he will not pass her the mashed potatoes.

In front of her on the train someone's talking about triangulation, putting the passengers to sleep with that talk.

There is a spate of movies about talking to the dead.

Someone saw his secret coming out of the movies, spilling out onto the street, and reported back on crooked teeth.

Her daughter's birthday is the same as the man's. You see, he's a good man. She always knew that. There used to be romance and romance in war and on the road. They wore armor. Little people in little suits of armor.

## FOOTNOTES TO A THROWN AWAY POEM

<sup>1</sup> (name redacted)

<sup>2</sup> England

<sup>3</sup> Had case of v.d.

<sup>4</sup> This has happened to me more than once

<sup>5</sup> In Trenton

<sup>6</sup> “Spate” is your kind of word  
Gin is the kind of drink you drink a lot

<sup>7</sup> Someone who doesn’t like mashed potatoes

<sup>8</sup> Bill Clinton liked to use “triangulation” (the word)

<sup>9</sup> Motto: *It is in my mind*

## WELL MET

I dreamed about meeting an actual doctor  
in street clothes, not scrubs

I dreamed I was on Omote-Sando, with my pet monkey  
and he had my movie treatment  
tucked in his backpack

I dreamed you weren't really you  
but that we, that is, both of us were part of a team  
known professionally as the Magnetic Magnificats

Always I am dreaming about **being on a public  
conveyance**

I used to think of this as stolen time

I dreamed I met Margaret Thatcher, Richard Nixon, and  
somebody else  
not necessarily in that order

I dreamed again about my monkey

about my movie treatment

I dreamed I was on this bus and  
an ambulance went by

I dreamed I went to my doctor,  
Dr. Brest, and he made jokes  
about his own weight

I dreamed about a harbor  
and it was windy  
more like the end than  
the beginning

You were sitting on a bar stool  
no surprise there  
you were going on and on about pandering  
there's pandering and there's pandering and then  
there's pandering

I dreamed I was waiting to see my doctor  
it felt like a really long time

FROM *THE GLASS BOOK*

A group of birds sped northwest along the Parkway and turned right on 23rd.

The woman followed a man because he looked like a cop. She was almost marching. The bird fanfare swayed back around and they were so feather-gay she had to follow.

She wanted to read their thoughts, ringing with song and truth, although their ideas could still be lost.

(I'm making an announcement about this page, it's "Untitled")

She lost track of her father, quite early, his words ringing with encoded meanderings. Her mother was more like a cloud than a mother.

These brick sidewalks, her trademark, roll and roll. A drunk could fall here. Tree limbs, once companionable, became the enemy. That oak or one like it was blamed by the mayor for significant deaths.

She straightened her back as if to start practicing her scales.

(I'm saying, "Died after a brief illness")

Lately she's been trying to see beyond the obelisk in the mockingbird park. The loud ones drown out the boat traffic.

She considers her chances at winning the imaginary quiz show, final round. She knows it's getting dark and she ought to come out of there. She almost knows. Which comes first. *Romeo and Juliet, or, All's Well.*

Wrote: *Have a dream here about something. Put in something about it here.*

“THE DAY IS ABOUT TO COME, PUT ON YOUR SOUL.”

– CESAR VALLEJO

A little more sunshine refrained by the invisible  
camera operator, so we push on carrying  
tubes of survival and other supplies of free coupons.

More condescension and I continue to look dejected.  
But there with a landscape-like food allowance,  
layered there, next to the armory, next to where  
Tom Cats pitch pennies.

Reading by red walnut lamp shadows, smell the open maw  
and the putrid extra tooth of skinny people.  
Leave out the deteriorating telescopes of time  
erasing rat-a-tats.

Tell me again three times why this is a vaulting  
automobile  
for I do want to know, finally, I am waiting for you to go  
downstairs and fetch one of your basic dictionary replicas.

We were having this semi-deep thought and children are acting all  
insane and even pretending to be babies  
getting ready to fall off when no one is looking.

## HOTEL RESIDENT ARTIST

There's a naked woman in my hotel room  
shower, an inverted "V" from the waist  
down and the waist up.  
Her arms are half-size wings. Half her size.

In place of her head there's a crest of foam,  
a wave about to break, a half moon  
where the neck could be, framing  
the jutting showerhead: Super Saver  
Shower Massage.

The neck-moon cradles a fetus.  
A man's Cheshire Cat head  
exuding excuses, full of a silence  
born out of free sex in another country.

Then there's a crow hovering outside my hotel  
window. It dips close, red talons raised,  
wearing not just fur, but blue fur  
and shopped out wheezing under the weight  
of its purchases. Walking around underground.

## OBLIQUE VIEW

1

Sibling rivalry hasn't come as far as we like. We haven't resolved it in this whole new era of bedroom windows. Full of light this is a place and I find that it is the last place on earth. I expect to see you not that I'm a hallucination. There are a few podiums and more screams. I just want you to stay at home with my heart. I do not belong therefore how can I resign in protest. Let's not get carried away but it might be vile. Chain links hold many things including the future business community. Not much of a character I don't think that way. Just what we need a pencil sharpener. My rocky my rocky. A box of rocks. Dirtiness doesn't work for me like it once did. Tripods get me going. There are clouds to do. I want to feel like I'm old in case I never get there.

2

Dust all over checkered surfaces waiting for him to pass my twenties. A bookmark. A tattered hand. A park bench. There was no reason for that restaurant to close down. Bertha Palermo's noodles were terrible she knew you never mopped the floor. Upstairs domestic violence more often than not. Uncharacteristic nighttime telephone call. You just want to hear someone's voice though not his. Some people will swallow any pill including ones meant for horses. A name to remember from when she seemed so young and her sister looked like high school. Hearing about your sins second hand. A wooden box left at St. Stephen's. Falling off shoes by the slaughterhouse loading dock. Not much of a premise. People stop you on the street to say thank you. Fantasize about those days, sleeping cars.

3

Nothing cut-up about his outfit or overdrawn. A few arrows stretched out on the floor. Your aphoristic and sociable conversation changed my brain I wish it could change how I think. About your map of Tokyo why did you circle every other stop on the Yamanote line? What you find in your new friend's left shoe is an intimate art form rather like wood. Nasal decisions can leave one feeling toothache. There's always tomorrow you think until you have a brush with death. More on that later. Your opening line has gotten sloppy since your wife left. It's a fish disaster in your toaster oven. Luck sometimes keeps us apart. He seemed so disappointed that I didn't faint away into the background one more time. The smell of ink on everything we collected. All of my spare DNA barks.

We came upon one of those last days of the world. There's a clearing up ahead and the discussion turned to anatomy in art class.

4

Remain calm while I update this. My fur. This is mink it doesn't fit me it was an animal. Gradually we all become human beings and that is love. Tomorrow there again appears another path. Another circular reason to break crockery. See that sun? Heaps of trash by our feet mark the true height of the mountains beyond. Next she asked him to go out and buy some milk please. Finally Ed ingratiated himself. What kind of omen I mean next door neighbor is that. I stayed overnight the first time and he tells me not to be outdone by the painter he has living down in the basement. Our waitress has a bad memory for details like food. Everyone wants to think they'll be some kind of hero when someone calls out for help. That's about it beyond why or how I don't know why I know Morse code. Someone we've been informed has opened an investigation into her name.

5

In a latent sort of way the last paragraph repeats that time I almost bought pot with my own money and the TV was finally beginning to work. Dietrich straddles silent pictures and talkies hypnotically.

HOW THE RIVER HAD INVITED HER DOWN  
FOR A SERIOUS TALK

We went down there because it was high  
It was a natural disaster and we wanted to get closer  
We talk about it now and again  
By the little league park and the small pier

We go down there to the place that feels natural  
It's clean  
We are clean when you compare us to dirty things  
Tires and dangerous vapors

We never see her any more  
It's a shock because you think a person's image cannot  
fade  
The face of someone twice removed  
gets replaced by someone else's face  
The mind's eye always seemed to grow keener,  
it's not doing that any more

Down there we can sit in the car and talk  
Don't get out  
Don't get out you can see everything  
you need to see  
from here



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Valerie Fox's previous books of poems include *The Rorschach Factory* (Straw Gate Books, 2006) and *Bundles of Letters Including A, V and Epsilon* (a compilation with Arlene Ang, Texture Press, 2008). She is an editor for *Press 1*, a journal of fiction, poetry, opinion, and photography. She teaches at Drexel University, in Philadelphia, and lives with her family in New Jersey.

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