



# OF RESIDUE

Barbara Tomash

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In memory of Marthe Reed

## Of Nature

I am neither the strangeness of  
the voice nor the creature too  
small and finite how quickly  
the need to expand oneself one  
draws the circle one dons the  
rescue suit living matter how  
quickly the earth's strangeness  
how quickly the voice is not  
god's but night's curious  
dimension I am neither an  
absolute form nor a part of the  
rest how quickly night  
blackens

## Of Water

to uproot the light you risk  
contamination build a small  
structure or fence lock the  
enclosure to minimize the  
threat what are the constituents  
you want to remove? words  
replicate themselves on  
websites these discussions  
concern the body's distance  
from other bodies to reveal  
openings both high and low as  
day begins to teeter these  
discussions concern feces and  
urine where to tie your dog or  
goat you cup your hands in  
clay and silt sound out what  
you've learned by now water is  
blue water is reddish brown  
always keep in mind you walk  
on water arms held tightly at  
your sides in absence of light  
in darkness in night you roll  
down the grassy slope singing  
somewhere over the rainbow

## Of Dissolution

the instructions are biochemical  
the instructions are finite and  
compressed the instructions take  
days you have wanted  
immersion front to back back to  
front inside out your fingers fall  
upon rock-dust strenuous as  
rock the force of your re-  
absorption ground-down leaves  
you have been asked to gather  
*terms to ponder* particulate  
matter eddying starting with  
smog the odor of insecticide  
lavish green fern fronds  
incinerated when brown gravel-  
dust rising on no-trespass roads  
ash-beaded clouds what doesn't  
diminish is nothing to begin  
with *torrential* means *to gather*  
if you're breathing in sand

## Of Dormancy

revived after stasis to regrow  
roots and ribcage of willowy  
human shape the child emerges  
lifespan long or short when  
starved phobias of insects and  
mean dogs invisible in the trees  
walk backwards a dozen  
careful steps connected by  
ring-count blue beam of  
flashlight thorn in the mouth  
after being thawed prehistoric  
worms moving and eating will  
not age a seed from a Judean  
date palm sprouts fruit found in  
an ancient squirrel's cache a  
sacred lotus yeast trapped in  
amber a fossil weevil slowly  
metabolizing in the lead cellars  
of the city where first things lie  
down with last almost by  
accident

## Of Longevity

spores from salt deposits coaxed  
duplicated and analyzed no  
natural limit no singular  
specimen thrown back against  
her own fragility you make  
various claims of me to mature  
reproduce cycle back to polyp  
after being multicellular I hear  
the notes of small birds in their  
sequence dispersing like sha-  
dows mirabilis gymnosperm  
lingers in permafrost in larvae  
of skin-beetles in competition of  
disenfranchised immortality I  
speak only and repeatedly of  
glass sponges found in the East  
China Sea



## Of Footprint

who else wanders here? crows  
coyotes stray dogs and cats  
house-humans and un-housed I  
hold tree roots tethered display  
troubled organs on my outside  
teeth remain as my residue  
whether I write these words or  
not what did I purchase? what  
did I instigate? what refuse  
constructs what “we” call  
“home?” in “our” earth-work  
glossary what won’t be spoken  
now? *quake speculate escape*  
rose vines grow into the  
camellia hedge the lawn is  
weeded with dandelions I press  
the tall grass down where I  
stand but this is not as passive  
as it sounds

## Of Surroundings

what if you need clumsy excess  
as a giant would twisted and  
tamed windows doors porches  
and terraces what if as a beaver  
does you need disintegration  
what if you need orb empty  
light hollow breezes uncluttered  
for a day or two or two million  
years of human evolution what  
if you experience signs of  
shattering and blind bone seeing  
inward abandons you and the  
shadow of a ridge in the  
continually flickering present

## Of Forgetting

a deer stepping delicately into  
the road covered in ticks or  
covered in a series of  
predictions or the mistake I  
visualized in the house over the  
back fence a girl weeding forty  
days forty nights thistles and  
crabgrass rain water and run off  
*O daughter* stars cleaved into  
the roof of my mouth the bigger  
the lightless object the better  
*rase it rase it* one guy draws his  
gun *even to the foundation*  
flower stems greening the water  
neither a small life of hooves  
rough hide nor a concept in  
error a pit spit out *let my right*  
*hand be forgot* in the language  
my grandmother spoke that  
won't be spoken now the hand  
of another man I preferred not  
made a fist the smell of lichen  
on stone to my quivering  
nostrils the nests of birds the  
webs of spiders mete out their  
masks didn't I think I was  
invisible?

## Of Motion

you invite everyone's attention here to "the human fit" a contraption made of minute hinges and bundles of concentrated light that you call "political life" that you call "the language of ambience and description" the body stripped to the waist in a doorway no one constructs you call this "rising sea levels" the point is that you call this your lens but that does not mean it has memory last night you read a novel that does not exist words without any kind of legs spiraling like the shells of sea snails without motion the writer has run away collapsing a bursting mouth you call this "nature writing" you call words "concentrated rays of light" but words are eyes that should never be closed life comes from life you invite everyone's attention here

## Of Order

in rose bushes the piano tuner  
has calibrated each drastic  
specificity of bough please can  
you measure the finitude of  
embodiment? out of sequence  
blurred in relation to or in a  
continuum with air currents  
echoes raptors radiation fall out  
history riding over the earth  
how many times do I swallow  
per minute? how many holes  
must be emptied in order to  
decenter sound? I go to the  
supermarket the auto mechanic  
the doctor how do I keep  
contiguous count? one wetland  
rat? one gasp? I write what is  
owed two different ways the  
tips of my fingers destabilized  
by thorns work does get done  
weeds come

## Of Leaves

near your bed the sea shell box  
of small bones and press your  
hand to chest you lack bones  
leave weight leave home leave  
gap and gone and get long  
fingered flick the length of flute  
calm full wind spine fan take  
hold tear not rake not weep into  
leaf heaps per hope your lungful

## Of Syncopation

so as to think *outside* so as to  
say *countryside* so as to possess  
the lost technique to sculpt our  
shinning domes so as to think  
when you think you generate  
sound and so you stumble a step  
behind scraping words from  
garden bricks so as to perceive  
*private quandary* and *de-*  
*privation* and you are panting to  
catch up I am alone criss-  
crossing arches of rose vines  
where the horizon line should be  
within the grid of the window  
screen and within my sights the  
people I love come in and out of  
focus I put my hands around my  
throat is it better to continue or  
begin again? if the parent tree is  
killed new buds sprout from its  
base



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